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THE

WORKS OF
W. E. HENLEY

VOLUME

I

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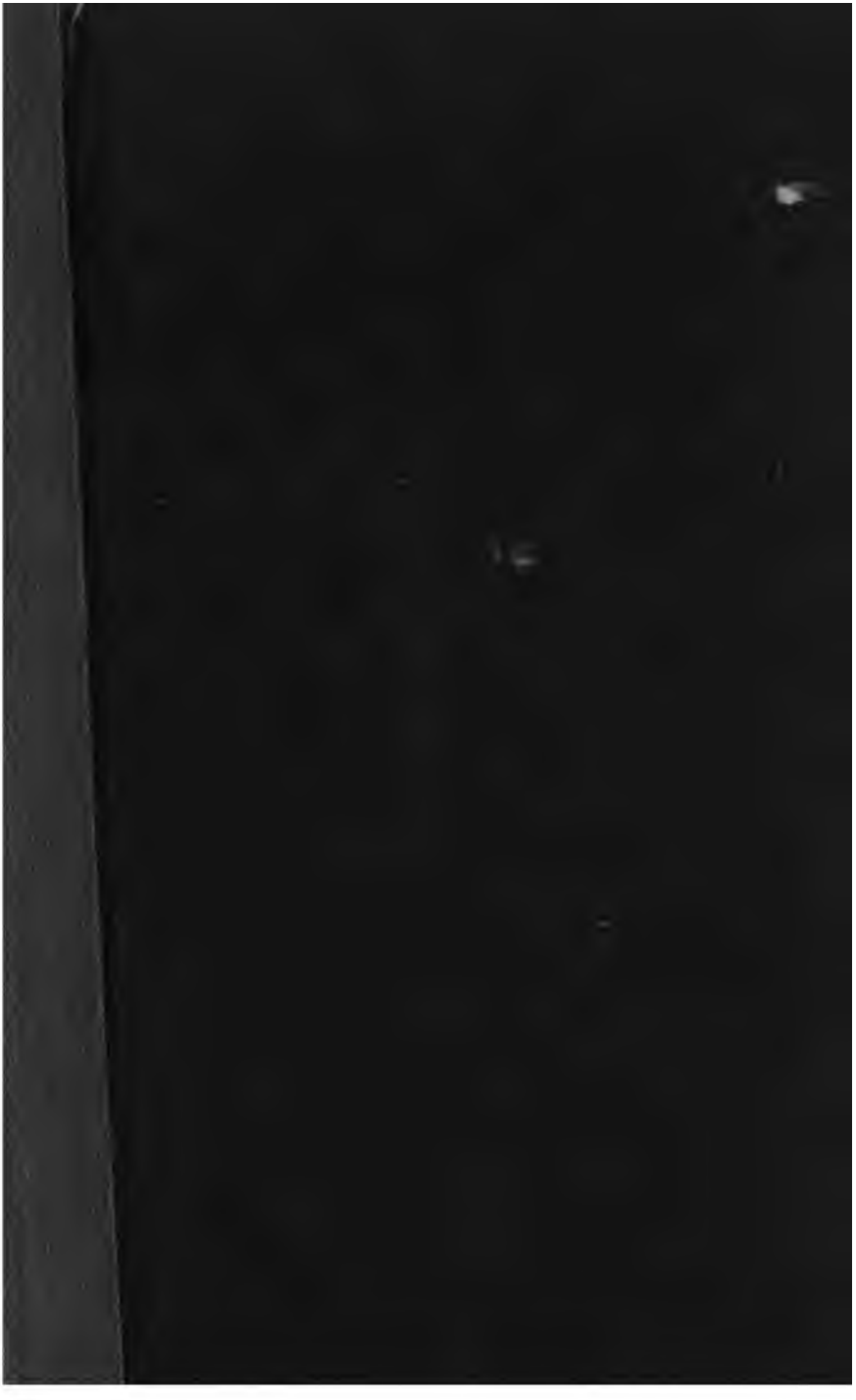

THE

WORKS OF
W. E. HENLEY

VOLUME

I

W. E. HENLEY

after the Bust by Rodin
in St. Paul's Cathedral

WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY

POEMS

VOL. I

'The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,
Though to itself it only live and die.'

SHAKESPEARE

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TO MY WIFE

Take, dear, my little sheaf of songs,
For, old or new,
All that is good in them belongs
Only to you;

And, singing as when all was young,
They will recall
Those others, lived but left unsung—
The best of all.

W. E. H.

APRIL 1888
SEPTEMBER 1897.

CONTENTS

IN HOSPITAL

PAGE

I. ENTER PATIENT

The morning mists still haunt the stony street 3

II. WAITING .

A square, squat room (a cellar on promotion) 4

III. INTERIOR

The gaunt brown walls 6

IV. BEFORE

Behold me waiting—waiting for the knife 7

V. OPERATION

You are carried in a basket 8

VI. AFTER

Like as a flamelet blanketed in smoke . 10

VII. VIGIL

Lived on one's back 11

VIII. STAFF-NURSE: OLD STYLE

The greater masters of the commonplace 14

IX. LADY-PROBATIONER PAGE

Some three, or five, or seven, and thirty years 15

X. STAFF-NURSE: NEW STYLE

Blue-eyed and bright of face but waning fast 16

XI. CLINICAL

Hist ? 17

XII. ETCHING

Two and thirty is the ploughman . 20

XIII. CASUALTY

As with varnish red and glistening . 22

XIV. AVE, CAESAR!

From the winter's gray despair . . 24

XV. 'THE CHIEF'

His brow spreads large and placid, and his eye 25

XVI. HOUSE-SURGEON

Exceeding tall, but built so well his height 26

XVII. INTERLUDE

O, the fun, the fun and frolic . . 27

XVIII. CHILDREN: PRIVATE WARD

Here in this dim, dull, double-bedded room 29

XIX. SCRUBBER PAGE

She's tall and gaunt, and in her hard, sad face 30

XX. VISITOR

Her little face is like a walnut shell . 31

XXI. ROMANCE

'Talk of pluck!' pursued the Sailor . 32

XXII. PASTORAL

It's the Spring 34

XXIII. MUSIC

Down the quiet eve 36

XXIV. SUICIDE

Staring corpselike at the ceiling . 38

XXV. APPARITION –

Thin-legged, thin-chested, slight unspeakably 40

XXVI. ANTEROTICS

Laughs the happy April morn . . 41

XXVII. NOCTURN

At the barren heart of midnight . 42

XXVIII. DISCHARGED

Carry me out into the wind . . 43

ENVOY

Do you remember that afternoon . . 45

THE SONG OF THE SWORD PAGE

The Sword Singing 49

ARABIAN NIGHTS' ENTERTAINMENTS

Once on a time 59

BRIC-À-BRAC

BALLADE OF A TOYOKUNI COLOUR-PRINT

Was I a Samurai renowned . . . 81

BALLADE OF YOUTH AND AGE

Spring at her height on a morn at prime . 83

BALLADE OF MIDSUMMER DAYS AND NIGHTS

With a ripple of leaves and a tinkle of streams 85

BALLADE OF DEAD ACTORS

Where are the passions they essayed . . 87

BALLADE MADE IN THE HOT WEATHER

Fountains that frisk and sprinkle . . 89

BALLADE OF TRUISMS

Gold or silver, every day 91

DOUBLE BALLADE OF LIFE AND FATE

Fools may pine, and sots may swill . . 93

DOUBLE BALLADE OF THE NOTHINGNESS OF THINGS

The big teetotum twirls 96

PAGE

AT QUEENSFERRY

The blackbird sang, the skies were clear . 100

ORIENTALE

She 's an enchanting little Israelite . . 102

IN FISHERROW

A hard north-easter fifty winters long . 103

BACK-VIEW

I watched you saunter down the sand . 105

CROQUIS

The beach was crowded. Pausing now and then 106

ATTADALE, WEST HIGHLANDS

A black and glassy float, opaque and still . 107

FROM A WINDOW IN PRINCES STREET

Above the Crags that fade and gloom . 109

IN THE DIALS

To *Garryowen* upon an organ ground . . 110

The gods are dead ? 111

Let us be drunk 112

When you are old 113

Beside the idle summer sea 114

The ways of Death are soothing and serene . 115

We shall surely die 117

What is to come we know not 118

ECHOES

		PAGE
I.	Chiming a dream by the way	121
II.	Life is bitter	123
III.	O, gather me the rose	124
IV.	Out of the night that covers me	125
V.	I am the Reaper	126
VI.	Praise the generous gods	128
VII.	Fill a glass with golden wine	129
VIII.	We 'll go no more a-roving	130
IX.	Madam Life 's a piece in bloom	132
X.	The sea is full of wandering foam	133
XI.	Thick is the darkness	134
XII.	To me at my fifth-floor window	135
XIII.	Bring her again, O western wind	136
XIV.	The wan sun westers, faint and slow	137
XV.	There is a wheel inside my head	139
XVI.	While the west is paling	140
XVII.	The sands are alive with sunshine	141
XVIII.	The nightingale has a lyre of gold	142
XIX.	Your heart has trembled to my tongue	143
XX.	The surges gushed and sounded	144
XXI.	We flash across the level	145
XXII.	The West a glimmering lake of light	146
XXIII.	The skies are strown with stars	148

PAGE

XXIV. The full sea rolls and thunders . . 149
XXV. In the year that 's come and gone . 150
XXVI. In the placid summer midnight . . 152
XXVII. She sauntered by the swinging seas . 154
XXVIII. Blithe dreams arise to greet us . . 155
XXIX. A child, curious and innocent . . 158
XXX. Kate-a-Whimsies, John-a-Dreams . 160
XXXI. O, have you blessed, behind the stars . 161
XXXII. O, Falmouth is a fine town . . . 162
XXXIII. The ways are green 165
XXXIV. Life in her creaking shoes . . . 167
XXXV. A late lark twitters from the quiet skies 168
XXXVI. I gave my heart to a woman . . 170
XXXVII. Or ever the knightly years were gone . 171
XXXVIII. On the way to Kew 173
XXXIX. The past was goodly once . . . 175
XL. The spring, my dear 177
XLI. The Spirit of Wine 178
XLII. A wink from Hesper 180
XLIII. Friends . . . old friends . . . 181
XLIV. If it should come to be . . . 183
XLV. From the brake the Nightingale . . 184
XLVI. In the waste hour 186
XLVII. Crosses and troubles 189

RHYMES AND RHYTHMS

PAGE

PROLOGUE—*Something is dead* 193

I. Where forlorn sunsets flare and fade . 195

II. We are the Choice of the Will . . 197

III. A desolate shore 200

IV. It came with the threat of a waning moon 202

V. Why, my heart, do we love her so . . 203

VI. One with the ruined sunset . . . 204

VII. There 's a regret so grinding . . . 205

VIII. Time and the Earth 207

IX. 'As like the Woman as you can' . . 209

X. Midsummer midnight skies . . . 211

XI. Gulls in an aëry morrice . . . 214

XII. Some starlit garden gray with dew . 215

XIII. Under a stagnant sky 216

XIV. Fresh from his fastnesses . . . 218

XV. You played and sang a snatch of song . 220

XVI. Space and dread and the dark . . 221

XVII. Tree, Old Tree of the Triple Crook . 223

XVIII. When you wake in your crib . . . 226

XIX. O, Time and Change 229

PAGE

XX. The shadow of Dawn 230

XXI. Trees and the menace of night . . 231

XXII. Here they trysted, here they strayed . 233

XXIII. Not to the staring Day 235

EPILOGUE

These, to you now, O, more than ever now . 239

IN HOSPITAL

1873-1875

I:A

On ne saurait dire à quel point un homme, seul dans son lit et malade, devient personnel.—

BALZAC.

I

ENTER PATIENT

THE morning mists still haunt the stony street;
The northern summer air is shrill and cold;
And lo, the Hospital, gray, quiet, old,
Where Life and Death like friendly chafferers meet.
Thro' the loud spaciousness and draughty gloom
A small, strange child — so agèd yet so young!—
Her little arm besplinted and beslung,
Precedes me gravely to the waiting-room.
I limp behind, my confidence all gone.
The gray-haired soldier-porter waves me on,
And on I crawl, and still my spirits fail:
A tragic meanness seems so to environ
These corridors and stairs of stone and iron,
Cold, naked, clean — half-workhouse and half-jail.

II

WAITING

A SQUARE, squat room (a cellar on promotion),
Drab to the soul, drab to the very daylight;
Plasters astray in unnatural-looking tinware;
Scissors and lint and apothecary's jars.

Here, on a bench a skeleton would writhe from,
Angry and sore, I wait to be admitted:
Wait till my heart is lead upon my stomach,
While at their ease two dressers do their chores.

One has a probe—it feels to me a crowbar.
A small boy sniffs and shudders after bluestone.
A poor old tramp explains his poor old ulcers.
Life is (I think) a blunder and a shame.

III

INTERIOR

THE gaunt brown walls
Look infinite in their decent meanness.
There is nothing of home in the noisy kettle,
The fulsome fire.

The atmosphere
Suggests the trail of a ghostly druggist.
Dressings and lint on the long, lean table—
Whom are they for?

The patients yawn,
Or lie as in training for shroud and coffin.
A nurse in the corridor scolds and wrangles.
It's grim and strange.

Far footfalls clank.
The bad burn waits with his head unbandaged.
My neighbour chokes in the clutch of chloral . . .
O, a gruesome world!

IV

BEFORE

Behold me waiting—waiting for the knife.
A little while, and at a leap I storm
The thick, sweet mystery of chloroform,
The drunken dark, the little death-in-life.
The gods are good to me: I have no wife,
No innocent child, to think of as I near
The fateful minute; nothing all-too dear
Unmans me for my bout of passive strife.
Yet am I tremulous and a trifle sick,
And, face to face with chance, I shrink a little:
My hopes are strong, my will is something weak.
Here comes the basket? Thank you. I am ready.
But, gentlemen my porters, life is brittle:
You carry Cæsar and his fortunes—steady!

V

OPERATION

You are carried in a basket,
Like a carcase from the shambles,
To the theatre, a cockpit
Where they stretch you on a table.

Then they bid you close your eyelids,
And they mask you with a napkin,
And the anæsthetic reaches
Hot and subtle through your being.

And you gasp and reel and shudder
In a rushing, swaying rapture,
While the voices at your elbow
Fade—receding—fainter—farther.

Lights about you shower and tumble,
And your blood seems crystallising—
Edged and vibrant, yet within you
Racked and hurried back and forward.

Then the lights grow fast and furious,
And you hear a noise of waters,
And you wrestle, blind and dizzy,
In an agony of effort,

Till a sudden lull accepts you,
And you sound an utter darkness . . .
And awaken . . . with a struggle . . .
On a hushed, attentive audience.

VI

AFTER

LIKE as a flamelet blanketed in smoke,
So through the anæsthetic shows my life;
So flashes and so fades my thought, at strife
With the strong stupor that I heave and choke
And sicken at, it is so foully sweet.
Faces look strange from space—and disappear.
Far voices, sudden loud, offend my ear—
And hush as sudden. Then my senses fleet:
All were a blank, save for this dull, new pain
That grinds my leg and foot; and brokenly
Time and the place glimpse on to me again;
And, unsurprised, out of uncertainty,
I awake—relapsing—somewhat faint and fain,
To an immense, complacent dreamery.

VII

VIGIL

LIVED on one's back,
In the long hours of repose,
Life is a practical nightmare—
Hideous asleep or awake.

Shoulders and loins
Ache - - - !
Ache, and the mattress,
Run into boulders and hummocks,
Glows like a kiln, while the bed-
clothes—
Tumbling, importunate, daft—
Ramble and roll, and the gas,
Screwed to its lowermost,
An inevitable atom of light,
Haunts, and a stertorous sleeper
Snores me to hate and despair.

All the old time
Surges malignant before me;
Old voices, old kisses, old songs
Blossom derisive about me;
While the new days
Pass me in endless procession:
A pageant of shadows
Silently, leeringly wending
On . . . and still on . . . still on!

Far in the stillness a cat
Languishes loudly. A cinder
Falls, and the shadows
Lurch to the leap of the flame. The next man to me
Turns with a moan; and the snorer,
The drug like a rope at his throat,
Gasps, gurgles, snorts himself free, as the night-nurse,
Noiseless and strange,
Her bull's eye half-lanterned in apron
(Whispering me, 'Are ye no'sleepin' yet?'),
Passes, list-slippered and peering,
Round . . . and is gone.

Sleep comes at last—
Sleep full of dreams and misgivings—
Broken with brutal and sordid
Voices and sounds that impose on me,
Ere I can wake to it,
The unnatural, intolerable day.

VIII

STAFF-NURSE: OLD STYLE

THE greater masters of the commonplace,
REMBRANDT and good SIR WALTER—only these
Could paint her all to you: experienced ease
And antique liveliness and ponderous grace;
The sweet old roses of her sunken face;
The depth and malice of her sly, gray eyes;
The broad Scots tongue that flatters, scolds, defies;
The thick Scots wit that fells you like a mace.
These thirty years has she been nursing here,
Some of them under SYME, her hero still.
Much is she worth, and even more is made of her.
Patients and students hold her very dear.
The doctors love her, tease her, use her skill.
They say 'The Chief' himself is half-afraid of her.

IX

LADY-PROBATIONER

SOME three, or five, or seven, and thirty
years;
A Roman nose; a dimpling double-chin;
Dark eyes and shy that, ignorant of sin,
Are yet acquainted, it would seem, with
tears;
A comely shape; a slim, high-coloured hand,
Graced, rather oddly, with a signet ring;
A bashful air, becoming everything;
A well-bred silence always at command.
Her plain print gown, prim cap, and bright
steel chain
Look out of place on her, and I remain
Absorbed in her, as in a pleasant mystery.
Quick, skilful, quiet, soft in speech and
touch . . .
'Do you like nursing?' 'Yes, Sir, very
much.'
Somehow, I rather think she has a history.

X

STAFF-NURSE: NEW STYLE

BLUE-EYED and bright of face but waning fast
Into the sere of virginal decay,
I view her as she enters, day by day,
As a sweet sunset almost overpast.
Kindly and calm, patrician to the last,
Superbly falls her gown of sober gray,
And on her chignon's elegant array
The plainest cap is somehow touched with caste.
She talks BEETHOVEN; frowns disapprobation
At BALZAC'S name, sighs it at 'poor GEORGE SAND'S';
Knows that she has exceeding pretty hands;
Speaks Latin with a right accentuation;
And gives at need (as one who understands)
Draught, counsel, diagnosis, exhortation.

XI

CLINICAL

HIST? . . .
Through the corridor's echoes
Louder and nearer
Comes a great shuffling of feet.
Quick, every one of you,
Straight your quilts, and be decent!
Here's the Professor.

In he comes first
With the bright look we know,
From the broad, white brows the kind eyes
Soothing yet nerving you. Here at his elbow,
White-capped, white-aproned, the Nurse,
Towel on arm and her inkstand
Fretful with quills.
Here in the ruck, anyhow,

Surging along,
Louts, duffers, exquisites, students, and prigs—
Whiskers and foreheads, scarf-pins and spectacles—
Hustles the Class! And they ring themselves
Round the first bed, where the Chief
(His dressers and clerks at attention),
Bends in inspection already.

So shows the ring
Seen from behind round a conjurer
Doing his pitch in the street.
High shoulders, low shoulders, broad shoulders, narrow ones,
Round, square, and angular, serry and shove;
While from within a voice,
Gravely and weightily fluent,
Sounds; and then ceases; and suddenly
(Look at the stress of the shoulders!)
Out of a quiver of silence,
Over the hiss of the spray,
Comes a low cry, and the sound

Of breath quick intaken through teeth
Clenched in resolve. And the Master
Breaks from the crowd, and goes,
Wiping his hands,
To the next bed, with his pupils
Flocking and whispering behind him.

Now one can see.
Case Number One
Sits (rather pale) with his bedclothes
Stripped up, and showing his foot
(Alas for God's Image!)
Swaddled in wet, white lint
Brilliantly hideous with red.

XII

ETCHING

Two and thirty is the ploughman.
He 's a man of gallant inches,
And his hair is close and curly,
And his beard;
But his face is wan and sunken,
And his eyes are large and brilliant,
And his shoulder-blades are sharp,
And his knees.

He is weak of wits, religious,
Full of sentiment and yearning,
Gentle, faded—with a cough
And a snore.
When his wife (who was a widow,
And is many years his elder)
Fails to write, and that is always,
He desponds.

Let his melancholy wander,
And he 'll tell you pretty stories
Of the women that have wooed him
Long ago;
Or he 'll sing of bonnie lasses
Keeping sheep among the heather,
With a crackling, hackling click
In his voice.

XIII

CASUALTY

As with varnish red and glistening
Dripped his hair; his feet looked rigid;
Raised, he settled stiffly sideways:
You could see his hurts were spinal.

He had fallen from an engine,
And been dragged along the metals.
It was hopeless, and they knew it;
So they covered him, and left him.

As he lay, by fits half sentient,
Inarticulately moaning,
With his stockinged soles protruded
Stark and awkward from the blankets,

To his bed there came a woman,
Stood and looked and sighed a little,
And departed without speaking,
As himself a few hours after.

I was told it was his sweetheart.
They were on the eve of marriage.
She was quiet as a statue,
But her lip was gray and writhen.

XIV

AVE, CAESAR!

From the winter's gray despair,
From the summer's golden languor,
Death, the lover of Life,
Frees us for ever.

Inevitable, silent, unseen,
Everywhere always,
Shadow by night and as light in the day,
Signs she at last to her chosen;
And, as she waves them forth,
Sorrow and Joy
Lay by their looks and their voices,
Set down their hopes, and are made
One in the dim Forever.

Into the winter's gray delight,
Into the summer's golden dream,
Holy and high and impartial,
Death, the mother of Life,
Mingles all men for ever.

XV

'THE CHIEF'

His brow spreads large and placid, and his eye
Is deep and bright, with steady looks that still.
Soft lines of tranquil thought his face fulfill—
His face at once benign and proud and shy.
If envy scout, if ignorance deny,
His faultless patience, his unyielding will,
Beautiful gentleness and splendid skill,
Innumerable gratitudes reply.
His wise, rare smile is sweet with certainties,
And seems in all his patients to compel
Such love and faith as failure cannot quell.
We hold him for another Herakles,
Battling with custom, prejudice, disease,
As once the son of Zeus with Death and Hell.

XVI

HOUSE-SURGEON

EXCEEDING tall, but built so well his height
Half-disappears in flow of chest and limb;
Moustache and whisker trooper-like in trim;
Frank-faced, frank-eyed, frank-hearted; always bright
And always punctual—morning, noon, and night;
Bland as a Jesuit, sober as a hymn;
Humorous, and yet without a touch of whim;
Gentle and amiable, yet full of fight.
His piety, though fresh and true in strain,
Has not yet whitewashed up his common mood
To the dead blank of his particular Schism.
Sweet, unaggressive, tolerant, most humane,
Wild artists like his kindly elderhood,
And cultivate his mild Philistinism.

XVII

INTERLUDE

O, THE fun, the fun and frolic
That *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*
Scatters through a penny-whistle
Tickled with artistic fingers!

Kate the scrubber (forty summers,
Stout but sportive) treads a measure,
Grinning, in herself a ballet,
Fixed as fate upon her audience.

Stumps are shaking, crutch-supported;
Splinted fingers tap the rhythm;
And a head all helmed with plasters
Wags a measured approbation.

Of their mattress-life oblivious,
All the patients, brisk and cheerful,
Are encouraging the dancer,
And applauding the musician.

Dim the gas-lights in the output
Of so many ardent smokers,
Full of shadow lurch the corners,
And the doctor peeps and passes.

There are, maybe, some suspicions
Of an alcoholic presence . . .
'Tak' a sup of this, my wumman!' . . .
New Year comes but once a twelve-
month.

XVIII

CHILDREN: PRIVATE WARD

HERE in this dim, dull, double-bedded room,
I play the father to a brace of boys,
Ailing but apt for every sort of noise,
Bedfast but brilliant yet with health and bloom.
Roden, the Irishman, is 'sieven past,'
Blue-eyed, snub-nosed, chubby, and fair of face.
Willie's but six, and seems to like the place,
A cheerful little collier to the last.
They eat, and laugh, and sing, and fight, all day;
All night they sleep like dormice. See them play
At Operations:—Roden, the Professor,
Saws, lectures, takes the artery up, and ties;
Willie, self-chloroformed, with half-shut eyes,
Holding the limb and moaning—Case and Dresser.

XIX

SCRUBBER

SHE 's tall and gaunt, and in her hard, sad face
With flashes of the old fun's animation
There lowers the fixed and peevish resignation
Bred of a past where troubles came apace.
She tells me that her husband, ere he died,
Saw seven of their children pass away,
And never knew the little lass at play
Out on the green, in whom he 's deified.
Her kin dispersed, her friends forgot and gone,
All simple faith her honest Irish mind,
Scolding her spoiled young saint, she labours on :
Telling her dreams, taking her patients' part,
Trailing her coat sometimes : and you shall find
No rougher, quainter speech, nor kinder heart.

XX

VISITOR

HER little face is like a walnut shell
With wrinkling lines; her soft, white hair adorns
Her withered brows in quaint, straight curls, like horns;
And all about her clings an old, sweet smell.
Prim is her gown and quakerlike her shawl.
Well might her bonnets have been born on her.
Can you conceive a Fairy Godmother
The subject of a strong religious call?
In snow or shine, from bed to bed she runs,
All twinkling smiles and texts and pious tales,
Her mittened hands, that ever give or pray,
Bearing a sheaf of tracts, a bag of buns:
A wee old maid that sweeps the Bridegroom's way,
Strong in a cheerful trust that never fails.

XXI

ROMANCE

'TALK of pluck!' pursued the Sailor,
Set at euchre on his elbow,
'I was on the wharf at Charleston,
Just ashore from off the runner.

'It was gray and dirty weather,
And I heard a drum go rolling,
Rub-a-dubbing in the distance
Awful dour-like and defiant.

'In and out among the cotton,
Mud, and chains, and stores, and anchors,
Tramped a squad of battered scarecrows—
Poor old Dixie's bottom dollar!

'Some had shoes, but all had rifles,
Them that wasn't bald was beardless,
And the drum was rolling *Dixie*,
And they stepped to it like men, sir!

'Rags and tatters, belts and bayonets,
On they swung, the drum a-rolling,
Mum and sour. It looked like fighting,
And they meant it too, by thunder!'

XXII

PASTORAL

It's the Spring.
Earth has conceived, and her bosom,
Teeming with summer, is glad.

Vistas of change and adventure,
Thro' the green land
The gray roads go beckoning and winding,
Peopled with wains, and melodious
With harness-bells jangling:
Jangling and twangling rough rhythms
To the slow march of the stately, great horses
Whistled and shouted along.

White fleets of cloud,
Argosies heavy with fruitfulness,
Sail the blue peacefully. Green flame the hedgerows.
Blackbirds are bugling, and white in wet winds
Sway the tall poplars.

Pageants of colour and fragrance,
Pass the sweet meadows, and viewless
Walks the mild spirit of May,
Visibly blessing the world.

O, the brilliance of blossoming orchards!
O, the savour and thrill of the woods,
When their leafage is stirred
By the flight of the Angel of Rain!
Loud lows the steer; in the fallows
Rooks are alert; and the brooks
Gurgle and tinkle and trill. Thro' the gloamings,
Under the rare, shy stars,
Boy and girl wander,
Dreaming in darkness and dew.

It 's the Spring.
A sprightliness feeble and squalid
Wakes in the ward, and I sicken,
Impotent, winter at heart.

XXIII

MUSIC

Down the quiet eve,
Thro' my window with the sunset
Pipes to me a distant organ
Foolish ditties;

And, as when you change
Pictures in a magic lantern,
Books, beds, bottles, floor, and ceiling
Fade and vanish,

And I'm well once more. . . .
August flares adust and torrid,
But my heart is full of April
Sap and sweetness.

In the quiet eve
I am loitering, longing, dreaming . . .
Dreaming, and a distant organ
Pipes me ditties.

I can see the shop,
I can smell the sprinkled pavement,
Where she serves—her chestnut chignon
Thrills my senses!

O, the sight and scent,
Wistful eve and perfumed pavement!
In the distance pipes an organ . . .
The sensation

Comes to me anew,
And my spirit for a moment
Thro' the music breathes the blessèd
Airs of London.

XXIV

SUICIDE

STARING corpselike at the ceiling,
See his harsh, unrazored features,
Ghastly brown against the pillow,
And his throat—so strangely bandaged!

Lack of work and lack of victuals,
A debauch of smuggled whisky,
And his children in the workhouse
Made the world so black a riddle

That he plunged for a solution;
And, although his knife was edgeless,
He was sinking fast towards one,
When they came, and found, and saved
him.

Stupid now with shame and sorrow,
In the night I hear him sobbing.
But sometimes he talks a little.
He has told me all his troubles.

In his broad face, tanned and bloodless,
White and wild his eyeballs glisten ;
And his smile, occult and tragic,
Yet so slavish, makes you shudder !

XXV

APPARITION

THIN-LEGGED, thin-chested, slight unspeakably,
Neat-footed and weak-fingered: in his face—
Lean, large-boned, curved of beak, and touched with race,
Bold-lipped, rich-tinted, mutable as the sea,
The brown eyes radiant with vivacity—
There shines a brilliant and romantic grace,
A spirit intense and rare, with trace on trace
Of passion and impudence and energy.
Valiant in velvet, light in ragged luck,
Most vain, most generous, sternly critical,
Buffoon and poet, lover and sensualist:
A deal of Ariel, just a streak of Puck,
Much Antony, of Hamlet most of all,
And something of the Shorter-Catechist.

XXVI

ANTEROTICS

LAUGHS the happy April morn
Thro' my grimy, little window,
And a shaft of sunshine pushes
Thro' the shadows in the square.

Dogs are tracing thro' the grass,
Crows are cawing round the chimneys,
In and out among the washing
Goes the West at hide-and-seek.

Loud and cheerful clangs the bell.
Here the nurses troop to breakfast.
Handsome, ugly, all are women . . .
O, the Spring—the Spring—the Spring!

XXVII

NOCTURN

At the barren heart of midnight,
When the shadow shuts and opens
As the loud flames pulse and flutter,
I can hear a cistern leaking.

Dripping, dropping, in a rhythm,
Rough, unequal, half-melodious,
Like the measures aped from nature
In the infancy of music;

Like the buzzing of an insect,
Still, irrational, persistent . . .
I must listen, listen, listen
In a passion of attention;

Till it taps upon my heartstrings,
And my very life goes dripping,
Dropping, dripping, drip-drip-dropping,
In the drip-drop of the cistern.

XXVIII

DISCHARGED

CARRY me out
Into the wind and the sunshine,
Into the beautiful world.

O, the wonder, the spell of the streets!
The stature and strength of the horses,
The rustle and echo of footfalls,
The flat roar and rattle of wheels!
A swift tram floats huge on us . . .
It's a dream?
The smell of the mud in my nostrils
Blows brave—like a breath of the sea!

As of old,
Ambulant, undulant drapery,
Vaguely and strangely provocative,
Flutters and beckons. O, yonder—
Is it?—the gleam of a stocking!
Sudden, a spire

Wedged in the mist! O, the houses,
The long lines of lofty, gray houses,
Cross-hatched with shadow and light!
These are the streets. . . .
Each is an avenue leading
Whither I will!

Free . . .!
Dizzy, hysterical, faint,
I sit, and the carriage rolls on with me
Into the wonderful world.

THE OLD INFIRMARY, EDINBURGH, 1873-75.

ENVOY

To CHARLES BAXTER

Do you remember
That afternoon—that Sunday afternoon!—
When, as the kirks were ringing in,
And the gray city teemed
With Sabbath feelings and aspects,
LEWIS—our LEWIS then,
Now the whole world's—and you,
Young, yet in shape most like an elder, came,
Laden with BALZACS
(Big, yellow books, quite impudently
French),
The first of many times
To that transformed back-kitchen where I lay
So long, so many centuries—
Or years is it!—ago?

Dear CHARLES, since then
We have been friends, LEWIS and you and I,
(How good it sounds, 'LEWIS and you and I!'):
Such friends, I like to think,

That in us three, LEWIS and me and you,
Is something of that gallant dream
Which old DUMAS—the generous, the humane,
The seven-and-seventy times to be forgiven!—
Dreamed for a blessing to the race,
The immortal *Musketeers*.

Our ATHOS rests—the wise, the kind,
The liberal and august, his fault atoned,
Rests in the crowded yard
There at the west of Princes Street. We three—
You, I, and LEWIS!—still afoot,
Are still together, and our lives,
In chime so long, may keep
(God bless the thought!)
Unjangled till the end.

W. E. H.

CHISWICK, *March* 1888.

THE SONG
OF THE SWORD

(*To* Rudyard Kipling)

1890

The Sword
Singing—
The voice of the Sword from the heart
of the Sword
Clanging imperious
Forth from Time's battlements
His ancient and triumphing Song.

In the beginning,
Ere God inspired Himself
Into the clay thing
Thumbed to His image,
The vacant, the naked shell
Soon to be Man:
Thoughtful He pondered it,
Prone there and impotent,

Fragile, inviting
Attack and discomfiture;
Then, with a smile—
As He heard in the Thunder
That laughed over Eden
The voice of the Trumpet,
The iron Beneficence,
Calling his dooms
To the Winds of the world—
Stooping, He drew
On the sand with His finger
A shape for a sign
Of his way to the eyes
That in wonder should waken,
For a proof of His will
To the breaking intelligence.
That was the birth of me:
I am the Sword.

Bleak and lean, gray and cruel,
Short-hilted, long-shafted,
I froze into steel;
And the blood of my elder,
His hand on the hafts of me,
Sprang like a wave

In the wind, as the sense
Of his strength grew to ecstasy;
Glowed like a coal
In the throat of the furnace;
As he knew me and named me
The War-Thing, the Comrade,
Father of honour
And giver of kingship,
The fame-smith, the song-master,
Bringer of women
On fire at his hands
For the pride of fulfilment,
Priest (saith the Lord)
Of his marriage with victory.
Ho! then, the Trumpet,
Handmaid of heroes,
Calling the peers
To the place of espousals!
Ho! then, the splendour
And glare of my ministry,
Clothing the earth
With a livery of lightnings!
Ho! then, the music
Of battles in onset,
And ruining armours,

And God's gift returning
In fury to God!
Thrilling and keen
As the song of the winter stars,
Ho! then, the sound
Of my voice, the implacable
Angel of Destiny!—
I am the Sword.

Heroes, my children,
Follow, O, follow me!
Follow, exulting
In the great light that breaks
From the sacred Companionship!
Thrust through the fatuous,
Thrust through the fungous brood,
Spawned in my shadow
And gross with my gift!
Thrust through, and hearken,
O, hark, to the Trumpet,
The Virgin of Battles,
Calling, still calling you
Into the Presence,
Sons of the Judgment,
Pure wafts of the Will!

Edged to annihilate,
Hilted with government,
Follow, O, follow me,
Till the waste places
All the gray globe over
Ooze, as the honeycomb
Drips, with the sweetness
Distilled of my strength,
And, teeming in peace
Through the wrath of my coming,
They give back in beauty
The dread and the anguish
They had of me visitant!
Follow, O follow, then,
Heroes, my harvesters!
Where the tall grain is ripe
Thrust in your sickles!
Stripped and adust
In a stubble of empire,
Scything and binding
The full sheaves of sovranty:
Thus, O, thus gloriously,
Shall you fulfil yourselves!
Thus, O, thus mightily,
Show yourselves sons of mine—

Yea, and win grace of me:
I am the Sword!

I am the feast-maker:
Hark, through a noise
Of the screaming of eagles,
Hark how the Trumpet,
The mistress of mistresses,
Calls, silver-throated
And stern, where the tables
Are spread, and the meal
Of the Lord is in hand!
Driving the darkness,
Even as the banners
And spears of the Morning;
Sifting the nations,
The slag from the metal,
The waste and the weak
From the fit and the strong;
Fighting the brute,
The abysmal Fecundity;
Checking the gross,
Multitudinous blunders,
The groping, the purblind

Excesses in service
Of the Womb universal,
The absolute drudge;
Firing the charactry
Carved on the World,
The miraculous gem
In the seal-ring that burns
On the hand of the Master—
Yea! and authority
Flames through the dim,
Unappeasable Grisliness
Prone down the nethermost
Chasms of the Void!—
Clear singing, clean slicing;
Sweet spoken, soft finishing;
Making death beautiful,
Life but a coin
To be staked in the pastime
Whose playing is more
Than the transfer of being;
Arch-anarch, chief builder,
Prince and evangelist,
I am the Will of God:
I am the Sword.

The Sword
Singing—
The voice of the Sword from the heart
of the Sword
Clanging majestical,
As from the starry-stained
Courts of the primal Supremacy,
His high, irresistible song.

ARABIAN NIGHTS' ENTERTAINMENTS

(*To* Elizabeth Robins Pennell)

1893

'O mes chères *Mille et Une Nuits* !'—*Fantasio.*

ONCE on a time
There was a little boy: a master-mage
By virtue of a Book
Of magic—O, so magical it filled
His life with visionary pomps
Processional! And Powers
Passed with him where he passed. And Thrones
And Dominations, glaived and plumed and mailed,
Thronged in the criss-cross streets,
The palaces pell-mell with playing-fields,
Domes, cloisters, dungeons, caverns, tents, arcades,
Of the unseen, silent City, in his soul
Pavilioned jealousy, and hid
As in the dusk, profound,
Green stillnesses of some enchanted mere.———

I shut mine eyes. . . . And lo!
A flickering snatch of memory that floats
Upon the face of a pool of darkness five
And thirty dead years deep,
Antic in girlish broideries
And skirts and silly shoes with straps
And a broad-ribanded leghorn, he walks
Plain in the shadow of a church
(St. Michael's: in whose brazen call
To curfew his first wails of wrath were whelmed),
Sedate for all his haste
To be at home; and, nestled in his arm,
Inciting still to quiet and solitude,
Boarded in sober drab,
With small, square, agitating cuts
Let in a-top of the double-columned, close,
Quakerlike print, a Book! . . .
What but that blessed brief
Of what is gallantest and best
In all the full-shelved Libraries of Romance?
The Book of rocs,
Sandalwood, ivory, turbans, ambergris,
Cream-tarts, and lettered apes, and calendars,
And ghouls, and genies—O, so huge

They might have overed the tall Minster Tower
Hands down, as schoolboys take a post!
In truth, the Book of Camaralzaman,
Schemselnihar and Sindbad, Scheherezade
The peerless, Bedreddin, Badroulbadour,
Cairo and Serendib and Candahar,
And Caspian, and the dim, terrific bulk—
Ice-ribbed, fiend-visited, isled in spells and storms—
Of Kaf! . . . That centre of miracles,
The sole, unparalleled Arabian Nights!

Old friends I had a-many—kindly and grim
Familiars, cronies quaint
And goblin! Never a Wood but housed
Some morrice of dainty dapperlings. No Brook
But had his nunnery
Of green-haired, silvry-curving sprites,
To cabin in his grots, and pace
His lilied margents. Every lone Hillside
Might open upon Elf-Land. Every Stalk
That curled about a Bean-stick was of the breed

Of that live ladder by whose delicate rungs
You climbed beyond the clouds, and found
The Farm-House where the Ogre, gorged
And drowsy, from his great oak chair,
Among the flitches and pewters at the fire,
Called for his Faëry Harp. And in it flew,
And, perching on the kitchen table, sang
Jocund and jubilant, with a sound
Of those gay, golden-vowelled madrigals
The shy thrush at mid-May
Flutes from wet orchards flushed with the
triumphing dawn;
Or blackbirds rioting as they listened still,
In old-world woodlands rapt with an old-
world spring,
For Pan's own whistle, savage and rich and
lewd,
And mocked him call for call!

I could not pass
The half-door where the cobbler sat in view
Nor figure me the wizen Leprechaun,
In square-cut, faded reds and buckle-shoes,
Bent at his work in the hedge-side, and
know

Just how he tapped his brogue, and twitched
His wax-end this and that way, both with wrists
And elbows. In the rich June fields,
Where the ripe clover drew the bees,
And the tall quakers trembled, and the West Wind
Lolled his half-holiday away
Beside me lolling and lounging through my own,
'Twas good to follow the Miller's Youngest Son
On his white horse along the leafy lanes;
For at his stirrup linked and ran,
Not cynical and trapesing, as he loped
From wall to wall above the espaliers,
But in the bravest tops
That market-town, a town of tops, could show:
Bold, subtle, adventurous, his tail
A banner flaunted in disdain
Of human stratagems and shifts:
King over All the Catlands, present and past
And future, that moustached

Artificer of fortunes, Puss-in-Boots!
Or Bluebeard's Closet, with its plenishing
Of meat-hooks, sawdust, blood,
And wives that hung like fresh-dressed carcases—
Odd-fangled, most a butcher's, part
A faëry chamber hazily seen
And hazily figured—on dark afternoons
And windy nights was visiting of the best.
Then, too, the pelt of hoofs
Out in the roaring darkness told
Of Herne the Hunter in his antlered helm
Galloping, as with despatches from the Pit,
Between his hell-born Hounds.
And Rip Van Winkle . . . often I lurked to hear,
Outside the long, low timbered, tarry wall,
The mutter and rumble of the trolling bowls
Down the lean plank, before they fluttered the pins;
For, listening, I could help him play
His wonderful game,
In those blue, booming hills, with Mariners
Refreshed from kegs not coopered in this our world.

But what were these so near,
So neighbourly fancies to the spell that brought
The run of Ali Baba's Cave
Just for the saying 'Open Sesame,'
With gold to measure, peck by peck,
In round, brown wooden stoups
You borrowed at the chandler's? . . . Or one time
Made you Aladdin's friend at school,
Free of his Garden of Jewels, Ring and Lamp
In perfect trim? . . . Or Ladies, fair
For all the embrowning scars in their white breasts,
Went labouring under some dread ordinance,
Which made them whip, and bitterly cry the while,
Strange Curs that cried as they,
Till there was never a Black Bitch of all
Your consorting but might have gone
Spell-driven miserably for crimes
Done in the pride of womanhood and desire . . .
Or at the ghostliest altitudes of night,

While you lay wondering and acold,
Your sense was fearfully purged; and soon
Queen Labé, abominable and dear,
Rose from your side, opened the Box of Doom,
Scattered the yellow powder (which I saw
Like sulphur at the Docks in bulk),
And muttered certain words you could not hear;
And there! a living stream,
The brook you bathed in, with its weeds and flags
And cresses, glittered and sang
Out of the hearthrug over the nakedness,
Fair-scrubbed and decent, of your bedroom floor! . . .

I was—how many a time!—
That Second Calendar, Son of a King,
On whom 'twas vehemently enjoined,
Pausing at one mysterious door,
To pry no closer, but content his soul
With his kind Forty. Yet I could not rest
For idleness and ungovernable Fate.
And the Black Horse, which fed on sesame

(That wonder-working word!),
Vouchsafed his back to me, and spread his vans,
And soaring, soaring on
From air to air, came charging to the ground
Sheer, like a lark from the midsummer clouds,
And, shaking me out of the saddle, where I sprawled
Flicked at me with his tail,
And left me blinded, miserable, distraught
(Even as I was in deed,
When doctors came, and odious things were done
On my poor tortured eyes
With lancets; or some evil acid stung
And wrung them like hot sand,
And desperately from room to room
Fumble I must my dark, disconsolate way),
To get to Bagdad how I might. But there
I met with Merry Ladies. O you three—
Safie, Amine, Zobëidé—when my heart
Forgets you all shall be forgot!
And so we supped, we and the rest,

On wine and roasted lamb, rose-water, dates,
Almonds, pistachios, citrons. And Haroun
Laughed out of his lordly beard
On Giaffar and Mesrour (*I* knew the Three
For all their Mossoul habits). And outside
The Tigris, flowing swift
Like Severn bend for bend, twinkled and gleamed
With broken and wavering shapes of stranger stars;
The vast, blue night
Was murmurous with peris' plumes
And the leathern wings of genies; words of power
Were whispering; and old fishermen,
Casting their nets with prayer, might draw to shore
Dead loveliness: or a prodigy in scales
Worth in the Caliph's Kitchen pieces of gold:
Or copper vessels, stopped with lead,
Wherein some Squire of Eblis watched and railed,
In durance under potent charactry
Graven by the seal of Solomon the King. . . .

Then, as the Book was glassed
In Life as in some olden mirror's quaint,
Bewildering angles, so would Life
Flash light on light back on the Book; and both
Were changed. Once in a house decayed
From better days, harbouring an errant show
(For all its stories of dry-rot
Were filled with gruesome visitants in wax,
Inhuman, hushed, ghastly with Painted Eyes),
I wandered; and no living soul
Was nearer than the pay-box; and I stared
Upon them staring—staring. Till at last,
Three sets of rafters from the streets,
I strayed upon a mildewed, rat-run room,
With the two Dancers, horrible and obscene,
Guarding the door: and there, in a bedroom-set,
Behind a fence of faded crimson cords,
With an aspect of frills
And dimities and dishonoured privacy
That made you hanker and hesitate to look,
A Woman with her litter of Babes—all slain,

All in their nightgowns, all with Painted Eyes
Staring—still staring; so that I turned and ran
As for my neck, but in the street
Took breath. The same, it seemed,
And yet not all the same, I was to find,
As I went up! For afterwards,
Whenas I went my round alone—
All day alone—in long, stern, silent streets,
Where I might stretch my hand and take
Whatever I would: still there were Shapes of Stone,
Motionless, lifelike, frightening—for the Wrath
Had smitten them; but they watched,
This by her melons and figs, that by his rings
And chains and watches, with the hideous gaze,
The Painted Eyes insufferable,
Now, of those grisly images; and I
Pursued my best-belovéd quest,
Thrilled with a novel and delicious fear.
So the night fell—with never a lamplighter;

And through the Palace of the King
I groped among the echoes, and I felt
That they were there,
Dreadfully there, the Painted staring Eyes,
Hall after hall . . . Till lo! from far
A Voice! And in a little while
Two tapers burning! And the Voice,
Heard in the wondrous Word of God, was—
whose?
Whose but Zobëidé's,
The lady of my heart, like me
A True Believer, and like me
An outcast thousands of leagues beyond the
pale! . . .

Or, sailing to the Isles
Of Khaledan, I spied one evenfall
A black blotch in the sunset; and it
grew
Swiftly . . . and grew. Tearing their
beards,
The sailors wept and prayed; but the grave
ship,
Deep laden with spiceries and pearls, went
mad,

Wrenched the long tiller out of the steersman's hand,
And, turning broadside on,
As the most iron would, was haled and sucked
Nearer, and nearer yet;
And, all awash, with horrible lurching leaps
Rushed at that Portent, casting a shadow now
That swallowed sea and sky; and then,
Anchors and nails and bolts
Flew screaming out of her, and with clang on clang,
A noise of fifty stithies, caught at the sides
Of the Magnetic Mountain; and she lay,
A broken bundle of firewood, strown piecemeal
About the waters; and her crew
Passed shrieking, one by one; and I was left
To drown. All the long night I swam;
But in the morning, O, the smiling coast
Tufted with date-trees, meadowlike,
Skirted with shelving sands!' And a great wave

Cast me ashore; and I was saved alive.
So, giving thanks to God, I dried my clothes,
And, faring inland, in a desert place
I stumbled on an iron ring—
The fellow of fifty built into the Quays:
When, scenting a trap-door,
I dug, and dug; until my biggest blade
Stuck into wood. And then,
The flight of smooth-hewn, easy-falling stairs,
Sunk in the naked rock! The cool, clean vault,
So neat with niche on niche it might have been
Our beer-cellar but for the rows
Of brazen urns (like monstrous chemist's jars)
Full to the wide, squat throats
With gold-dust, but a-top
A layer of pickled-walnut-looking things
I knew for olives! And far, O, far away,
The Princess of China languished! Far away
Was marriage, with a Vizier and a Chief
Of Eunuchs and the privilege

Of going out at night
To play—unkenned, majestical, secure—
Where the old, brown, friendly river shaped
Like Tigris shore for shore! Haply a Ghoul
Sat in the churchyard under a frightened moon,
A thighbone in his fist, and glared
At supper with a Lady: she who took
Her rice with tweezers grain by grain.
Or you might stumble—there by the iron gates
Of the Pump Room—underneath the limes—
Upon Bedreddin in his shirt and drawers,
Just as the civil Genie laid him down.
Or those red-curtained panes,
Whence a tame cornet tenored it throatily
Of beer-pots and spittoons and new long pipes,
Might turn a caravansery's, wherein
You found Noureddin Ali, loftily drunk,
And that fair Persian, bathed in tears,
You'd not have given away
For all the diamonds in the Vale Perilous
You had that dark and disleaved afternoon

Escaped on a roc's claw,
Disguised like Sindbad—but in Christmas beef!
And all the blissful while
The schoolboy satchel at your hip
Was such a bulse of gems as should amaze
Gray-whiskered chapmen drawn
From over Caspian: yea, the Chief Jewellers
Of Tartary and the bazaars,
Seething with traffic, of enormous Ind. — — —

Thus cried, thus called aloud, to the child heart
The magian East: thus the child eyes
Spelled out the wizard message by the light
Of the sober, workaday hours
They saw, week in week out, pass, and still pass
In the sleepy Minster City, folded kind
In ancient Severn's arm,
Amongst her water-meadows and her docks,
Whose floating populace of ships—
Galliots and luggers, light-heeled brigantines,
Bluff barques and rake-hell fore-and-afters—brought

To her very doorsteps and geraniums
The scents of the World's End; the calls
That may not be gainsaid to rise and ride
Like fire on some high errand of the race;
The irresistible appeals
For comradeship that sound
Steadily from the irresistible sea.
Thus the East laughed and whispered, and the tale,
Telling itself anew
In terms of living, labouring life,
Took on the colours, busked it in the wear
Of life that lived and laboured; and Romance,
The Angel-Playmate, raining down
His golden influences
On all I saw, and all I dreamed and did,
Walked with me arm in arm,
Or left me, as one bediademed with straws
And bits of glass, to gladden at my heart
Who had the gift to seek and feel and find
His fiery-hearted presence everywhere.
Even so dear Hesper, bringer of all good things,
Sends the same silver dews

Of happiness down her dim, delighted skies
On some poor collier-hamlet—(mound on mound
Of sifted squalor; here a soot-throated stalk
Sullenly smoking over a row
Of flat-faced hovels; black in the gritty air
A web of rails and wheels and beams; with strings
Of hurtling, tipping trams)—
As on the amorous nightingales
And roses of Shíraz, or the walls and towers
Of Samarcand—the Ineffable—whence you espy
The splendour of Ginnistan's embattled spears,
Like listed lightnings.
Samarcand!
That name of names! That star-vaned belvedere
Builded against the Chambers of the South!
That outpost on the Infinite!
And behold!
Questing therefrom, you knew not what wild tide
Might overtake you: for one fringe

One suburb, is stablished on firm earth; but one
Floats founded vague
In lubberlands delectable—isles of palm
And lotus, fortunate mains, far-shimmering seas,
The promise of wistful hills—
The shining, shifting Sovranties of Dream.

BRIC-À-BRAC

1877-1888

'*The tune of the time.*'—HAMLET, *concerning* OSRIC.

BALLADE

OF A TOYOKUNI COLOUR-PRINT

To W. A.

WAS I a Samurai renowned,
Two-sworded, fierce, immense of bow?
A histrion angular and profound?
A priest? a porter?—Child, although
I have forgotten clean, I know
That in the shade of Fujisan,
What time the cherry-orchards blow,
I loved you once in old Japan.

As here you loiter, flowing-gowned
And hugely sashed, with pins a-row
Your quaint head as with flamelets crowned,
Demure, inviting—even so,
When merry maids in Miyako
To feel the sweet o' the year began,
And green gardens to overflow,
I loved you once in old Japan.

Clear shine the hills; the rice-fields round
Two cranes are circling; sleepy and slow,
A blue canal the lake's blue bound
Breaks at the bamboo bridge; and lo!
Touched with the sundown's spirit and glow,
I see you turn, with flirted fan,
Against the plum-tree's bloomy snow. . . .
I loved you once in old Japan!

Envoy

Dear, 'twas a dozen lives ago;
But that I was a lucky man
The Toyokuni here will show:
I loved you—once—in old Japan.

BALLADE

(DOUBLE REFRAIN)

OF YOUTH AND AGE

I. M.

Thomas Edward Brown

(1829-1896)

SPRING at her height on a morn at prime,
Sails that laugh from a flying squall,
Pomp of harmony, rapture of rhyme—
Youth is the sign of them, one and all.
Winter sunsets and leaves that fall,
An empty flagon, a folded page,
A tumble-down wheel, a tattered ball—
These are a type of the world of Age.

Bells that clash in a gaudy chime,
Swords that clatter in onsets tall,
The words that ring and the fames that
climb—
Youth is the sign of them, one and all.

Hymnals old in a dusty stall,
A bald, blind bird in a crazy cage,
The scene of a faded festival—
These are a type of the world of Age.

Hours that strut as the heirs of time,
Deeds whose rumour's a clarion-call,
Songs where the singers their souls sublime—
Youth is the sign of them, one and all.
A staff that rests in a nook of wall,
A reeling battle, a rusted gage,
The chant of a nearing funeral—
These are a type of the world of Age.

Envoy

Struggle and turmoil, revel and brawl—
Youth is the sign of them, one and all.
A smouldering hearth and a silent stage—
These are a type of the world of Age.

BALLADE

(DOUBLE REFRAIN)

OF MIDSUMMER DAYS AND NIGHTS

To W. H.

WITH a ripple of leaves and a tinkle of streams
The full world rolls in a rhythm of praise,
And the winds are one with the clouds and beams—
Midsummer days! Midsummer days!
The dusk grows vast; in a purple haze,
While the West from a rapture of sunset rights,
Faint stars their exquisite lamps upraise—
Midsummer nights! O midsummer nights!

The wood's green heart is a nest of dreams,
The lush grass thickens and springs and sways,

The rathe wheat rustles, the landscape gleams—
Midsummer days! Midsummer days!
In the stilly fields, in the stilly ways,
All secret shadows and mystic lights,
Late lovers murmur and linger and gaze—
Midsummer nights! O midsummer nights!

There's a music of bells from the trampling teams,
Wild skylarks hover, the gorses blaze,
The rich, ripe rose as with incense steams—
Midsummer days! Midsummer days!
A soul from the honeysuckle strays,
And the nightingale as from prophet heights
Sings to the Earth of her million Mays—
Midsummer nights! O midsummer nights!

Envoy

And it's O, for my dear and the charm that stays—
Midsummer days! Midsummer days!
It's O, for my Love and the dark that plights—
Midsummer nights! O midsummer nights!

BALLADE

OF DEAD ACTORS

I. M.

Edward John Henley

(1861-1898)

WHERE are the passions they essayed,
And where the tears they made to flow?
Where the wild humours they portrayed
For laughing worlds to see and know?
Othello's wrath and Juliet's woe?
Sir Peter's whims and Timon's gall?
And Millamant and Romeo?
Into the night go one and all.

Where are the braveries, fresh or frayed?
The plumes, the armours—friend and foe?
The cloth of gold, the rare brocade,
The mantles glittering to and fro?
The pomp, the pride, the royal show?
The cries of war and festival?
The youth, the grace, the charm, the glow?
Into the night go one and all.

The curtain falls, the play is played:
The Beggar packs beside the Beau;
The Monarch troops, and troops the Maid;
The Thunder huddles with the Snow.
Where are the revellers high and low?
The clashing swords? The lover's call?
The dancers gleaming row on row?
Into the night go one and all.

Envoy

Prince, in one common overthrow
The Hero tumbles with the Thrall:
As dust that drives, as straws that blow,
Into the night go one and all.

BALLADE

MADE IN THE HOT WEATHER

To C. M.

FOUNTAINS that frisk and sprinkle
The moss they overspill;
Pools that the breezes crinkle;
The wheel beside the mill,
With its wet, weedy frill;
Wind-shadows in the wheat;
A water-cart in the street;
The fringe of foam that girds
An islet's ferneries;
A green sky's minor thirds—
To live, I think of these!

Of ice and glass the tinkle,
Pellucid, silver-shrill;
Peaches without a wrinkle;
Cherries and snow at will,
From china bowls that fill

The senses with a sweet
Incuriousness of heat;
A melon's dripping sherds;
Cream-clotted strawberries;
Dusk dairies set with curds—
To live, I think of these!

Vale-lily and periwinkle;
Wet stone-crop on the sill;
The look of leaves a-twinkle
With windlets clear and still;
The feel of a forest rill
That wimples fresh and fleet
About one's naked feet;
The muzzles of drinking herds;
Lush flags and bulrushes;
The chirp of rain-bound birds—
To live, I think of these!

Envoy

Dark aisles, new packs of cards,
Mermaidens' tails, cool swards,
Dawn dews and starlit seas,
White marbles, whiter words—
To live, I think of these!

BALLADE OF TRUISMS

Gold or silver, every day,
Dies to gray.
There are knots in every skein.
Hours of work and hours of play
Fade away
Into one immense Inane.
Shadow and substance, chaff and grain,
Are as vain
As the foam or as the spray.
Life goes crooning, faint and fain,
One refrain:—
'If it could be always May!'

Though the earth be green and gay,
Though, they say,
Man the cup of heaven may drain;
Though, his little world to sway
He display
Hoard on hoard of pith and brain:
Autumn brings a mist and rain
That constrain

Him and his to know decay,
Where undimmed the lights that wane
Would remain,
If it could be always May.

Yea, alas, must turn to *Nay*,
Flesh to clay.
Chance and Time are ever twain.
Men may scoff, and men may pray,
But they pay
Every pleasure with a pain.
Life may soar, and Fortune deign
To explain
Where her prizes hide and stay;
But we lack the lusty train
We should gain,
If it could be always May.

Envoy

Time, the pedagogue, his cane
Might retain,
But his charges all would stray
Truanting in every lane—
Jack with Jane—
If it could be always May.

DOUBLE BALLADE

OF LIFE AND FATE

Fools may pine, and sots may swill,
Cynics gibe, and prophets rail,
Moralists may scourge and drill,
Preachers prose, and fainthearts quail.
Let them whine, or threat, or wail!
Till the touch of Circumstance
Down to darkness sink the scale,
Fate 's a fiddler, Life 's a dance.

What if skies be wan and chill?
What if winds be harsh and stale?
Presently the east will thrill,
And the sad and shrunken sail,
Bellying with a kindly gale,
Bear you sunwards, while your chance
Sends you back the hopeful hail:—
'Fate 's a fiddler, Life 's a dance.'

Idle shot or coming bill,
Hapless love or broken bail,
Gulp it (never chew your pill!),
And, if Burgundy should fail,
Try the humbler pot of ale!
Over all is heaven's expanse.
Gold 's to find among the shale.
Fate 's a fiddler, Life 's a dance.

Dull Sir Joskin sleeps his fill,
Good Sir Galahad seeks the Grail,
Proud Sir Pertinax flaunts his frill,
Hard Sir Æger dints his mail;
And the while by hill and dale
Tristram's braveries gleam and glance,
And his blithe horn tells its tale:—
'Fate 's a fiddler, Life 's a dance.'

Araminta 's grand and shrill,
Delia 's passionate and frail,
Doris drives an earnest quill,
Athanasia takes the veil:
Wiser Phyllis o'er her pail,
At the heart of all romance

Reading, sings to Strephon's flail:—
'Fate 's a fiddler, Life 's a dance.'

Every Jack must have his Jill
(Even Johnson had his Thrale!):
Forward, couples—with a will!
This, the world, is not a jail.
Hear the music, sprat and whale!
Hands across, retire, advance!
Though the doomsman 's on your trail,
Fate 's a fiddler, Life 's a dance.

Envoy

Boys and girls, at slug and snail
And their kindred look askance.
Pay your footing on the nail:
Fate 's a fiddler, Life 's a dance.

DOUBLE BALLADE

OF THE NOTHINGNESS OF THINGS

THE big teetotum twirls,
And epochs wax and wane
As chance subsides or swirls;
But of the loss and gain
The sum is always plain.
Read on the mighty pall,
The weed of funeral
That covers praise and blame,
The -isms and the -anities,
Magnificence and shame:—
'O Vanity of Vanities!'

The Fates are subtile girls!
They give us chaff for grain.
And Time, the Thunderer, hurls,
Like bolted death, disdain
At all that heart and brain

Conceive, or great or small,
Upon this earthly ball.
Would you be knight and dame?
Or woo the sweet humanities?
Or illustrate a name?
O Vanity of Vanities!

We sound the sea for pearls,
Or drown them in a drain;
We flute it with the merles,
Or tug and sweat and strain;
We grovel, or we reign;
We saunter, or we brawl;
We answer, or we call;
We search the stars for Fame,
Or sink her subterranities;
The legend 's still the same:—
'O Vanity of Vanities!'

Here at the wine one birls,
There some one clanks a chain.
The flag that this man furls
That man to float is fain.
Pleasure gives place to pain:

These in the kennel crawl,
While others take the wall.
She has a glorious aim,
He lives for the inanities.
What comes of every claim ?
O Vanity of Vanities !

Alike are clods and earls.
For sot, and seer, and swain,
For emperors and for churls,
For antidote and bane,
There is but one refrain :
But one for king and thrall,
For David and for Saul,
For fleet of foot and lame,
For pieties and profanities,
The picture and the frame :—
' O Vanity of Vanities ! '

Life is a smoke that curls—
Curls in a flickering skein,
That winds and whisks and whirls,
A figment thin and vain,
Into the vast Inane.

One end for hut and hall!
One end for cell and stall!
Burned in one common flame
Are wisdoms and insanities.
For this alone we came:—
'O Vanity of Vanities!'

Envoy

Prince, pride must have a fall.
What is the worth of all
Your state's supreme urbanities?
Bad at the best 's the game.
Well might the Sage exclaim:—
'O Vanity of Vanities!'

AT QUEENSFERRY

To W. G. S.

THE blackbird sang, the skies were clear and clean;
We bowled along a road that curved a spine
Superbly sinuous and serpentine
Thro' silent symphonies of summer green.
Sudden the Forth came on us — sad of mien,
No cloud to colour it, no breeze to line:
A sheet of dark, dull glass, without a sign
Of life or death, two spits of sand between.
Water and sky merged blank in mist together,
The Fort loomed spectral, and the Guard-ship's spars
Traced vague, black shadows on the shimmery glaze:

We felt the dim, strange years, the gray, strange weather,
The still, strange land, unvexed of sun or stars,
Where Lancelot rides clanking thro' the haze.

ORIENTALE

SHE 's an enchanting little Israelite,
A world of hidden dimples !—Dusky-eyed,
A starry-glancing daughter of the Bride,
With hair escaped from some Arabian Night,
Her lip is red, her cheek is golden-white,
Her nose a scimitar ; and, set aside
The bamboo hat she cocks with so much pride,
Her dress a dream of daintiness and delight.
And when she passes with the dreadful boys
And romping girls, the cockneys loud and crude,
My thought, to the Minories tied yet moved to range
The Land o' the Sun, commingles with the noise
Of magian drums and scents of sandalwood
A touch Sidonian — modern — taking — strange !

IN FISHERROW

A HARD north-easter fifty winters long
Has bronzed and shrivelled sere her face and neck;
Her locks are wild and gray, her teeth a wreck;
Her foot is vast, her bowed leg spare and strong.
A wide blue cloak, a squat and sturdy throng
Of curt blue coats, a mutch without a speck,
A white vest broidered black, her person deck,
Nor seems their picked, stern, old-world quaintness wrong.
Her great creel forehead-slung, she wanders nigh,
Easing the heavy strap with gnarled, brown fingers,

The spirit of traffic watchful in her eye,
Ever and anon imploring you to buy,
As looking down the street she onward lingers,
Reproachful, with a strange and doleful cry.

BACK-VIEW

To D. F.

I WATCHED you saunter down the sand:
Serene and large, the golden weather
Flowed radiant round your peacock feather,
And glistened from your jewelled hand.
Your tawny hair, turned strand on strand
And bound with blue ribands together,
Streaked the rough tartan, green like heather,
That round your lissome shoulder spanned.
Your grace was quick my sense to seize:
The quaint looped hat, the twisted tresses,
The close-drawn scarf, and under these
The flowing, flapping draperies—
My thought an outline still caresses,
Enchanting, comic, Japanese!

CROQUIS

To G. W.

THE beach was crowded. Pausing now and then,
He groped and fiddled doggedly along,
His worn face glaring on the thoughtless throng
The stony peevishness of sightless men.
He seemed scarce older than his clothes. Again,
Grotesquing thinly many an old sweet song,
So cracked his fiddle, his hand so frail and wrong,
You hardly could distinguish one in ten.
He stopped at last, and sat him on the sand,
And, grasping wearily his bread-winner,
Stared dim towards the blue immensity,
Then leaned his head upon his poor old hand.
He may have slept: he did not speak nor stir:
His gesture spoke a vast despondency.

ATTADALE, WEST HIGHLANDS

To A. J.

A BLACK and glassy float, opaque and still,
The loch, at furthest ebb supine in sleep,
Reversing, mirrored in its luminous deep
The calm gray skies; the solemn spurs of hill;
Heather, and corn, and wisps of loitering haze;
The wee white cots, black-hatted, plumed with smoke;
The braes beyond—and when the ripple awoke,
They wavered with the jarred and wavering glaze.
The air was hushed and dreamy. Evermore
A noise of running water whispered near.
A straggling crow called high and thin. A bird

Trilled from the birch-leaves. Round the shingled shore,
Yellow with weed, there wandered, vague and clear,
Strange vowels, mysterious gutturals, idly heard.

FROM A WINDOW IN PRINCES STREET

To M. M. M'B.

ABOVE the Crags that fade and gloom
Starts the bare knee of Arthur's Seat;
Ridged high against the evening bloom,
The Old Town rises, street on street;
With lamps bejewelled, straight ahead,
Like rampired walls the houses lean,
All spired and domed and turreted,
Sheer to the valley's darkling green;
Ranged in mysterious disarray,
The Castle, menacing and austere,
Looms through the lingering last of day;
And in the silver dusk you hear,
Reverberated from crag and scar,
Bold bugles blowing points of war.

IN THE DIALS

To *Garryowen* upon an organ ground
Two girls are jigging. Riotously they trip,
With eyes aflame, quick bosoms, hand on hip,
As in the tumult of a witches' round.
Youngsters and youngsters round them prance and bound.
Two solemn babes twirl ponderously, and skip.
The artist's teeth gleam from his bearded lip.
High from the kennel howls a tortured hound.
The music reels and hurtles, and the night
Is full of stinks and cries; a naphtha-light
Flares from a barrow; battered and obtused
With vices, wrinkles, life and work and rags,
Each with her inch of clay, two loitering hags
Look on dispassionate—critical—something 'mused.

THE gods are dead? Perhaps they are!
Who knows?
Living at least in Lemprière undeleted,
The wise, the fair, the awful, the jocose,
Are one and all, I like to think, retreated
In some still land of lilacs and the rose.

Once high they sat, and high o'er earthly shows
With sacrificial dance and song were greeted.
Once . . . long ago. But now, the story goes,
The gods are dead.

It must be true. The world, a world of prose,
Full-crammed with facts, in science swathed and sheeted,
Nods in a stertorous after-dinner doze!
Plangent and sad, in every wind that blows
Who will may hear the sorry words repeated:—
'The Gods are Dead!'

To F. W.

LET us be drunk, and for a while forget,
Forget, and, ceasing even from regret,
Live without reason and despite of rhyme,
As in a dream preposterous and sublime,
Where place and hour and means for once
are met.

Where is the use of effort? Love and debt
And disappointment have us in a net.
Let us break out, and taste the morning
prime . . .
Let us be drunk.

In vain our little hour we strut and fret,
And mouth our wretched parts as for a bet:
We cannot please the tragicaster Time.
To gain the crystal sphere, the silver clime,
Where Sympathy sits dimpling on us yet,
Let us be drunk!

WHEN you are old, and I am passed away—
Passed, and your face, your golden face, is gray—
I think, whate'er the end, this dream of mine,
Comforting you, a friendly star will shine
Down the dim slope where still you stumble and stray.

So may it be: that so dead Yesterday,
No sad-eyed ghost but generous and gay,
May serve you memories like almighty wine,
When you are old!

Dear Heart, it shall be so. Under the sway
Of death the past's enormous disarray
Lies hushed and dark. Yet though there come no sign,
Live on well pleased: immortal and divine
Love shall still tend you, as God's angels may,
When you are old.

BESIDE the idle summer sea
And in the vacant summer days,
Light Love came fluting down the ways,
Where you were loitering with me.

Who has not welcomed, even as we,
That jocund minstrel and his lays
Beside the idle summer sea
And in the vacant summer days?

We listened, we were fancy-free;
And lo! in terror and amaze
We stood alone—alone at gaze
With an implacable memory
Beside the idle summer sea.

I. M.

R. G. C. B.

1878

THE ways of Death are soothing and serene,
And all the words of Death are grave and sweet.
From camp and church, the fireside and the street,
She beckons forth—and strife and song have been.

A summer night descending cool and green
And dark on daytime's dust and stress and heat,
The ways of Death are soothing and serene,
And all the words of Death are grave and sweet.

O glad and sorrowful, with triumphant mien
And radiant faces look upon, and greet
This last of all your lovers, and to meet
Her kiss, the Comforter's, your spirit lean. . . .
The ways of Death are soothing and serene.

We shall surely die:
Must we needs grow old?
Grow old and cold,
And we know not why?

O, the By-and-By,
And the tale that's told!
We shall surely die:
Must we needs grow old?

Grow old and sigh,
Grudge and withhold,
Resent and scold? . . .
Not you and I?
We shall surely die!

WHAT is to come we know not. But we know
That what has been was good—was good to show,
Better to hide, and best of all to bear.
We are the masters of the days that were:
We have lived, we have loved, we have suffered . . . even so.

Shall we not take the ebb who had the flow?
Life was our friend. Now, if it be our foe—
Dear, though it spoil and break us!—need we care
What is to come?

Let the great winds their worst and wildest blow,
Or the gold weather round us mellow slow:
We have fulfilled ourselves, and we can dare
And we can conquer, though we may not share
In the rich quiet of the afterglow
What is to come.

ECHOES

1872-1889

Aquí está encerrada el alma del licenciado Pedro Garcías.

GIL BLAS *AU LECTEUR.*

I

TO MY MOTHER

CHIMING a dream by the way
With ocean's rapture and roar,
I met a maiden to-day
Walking alone on the shore:
Walking in maiden wise,
Modest and kind and fair,
The freshness of spring in her eyes
And the fulness of spring in her hair.

Cloud-shadow and scudding sun-burst
Were swift on the floor of the sea,
And a mad wind was romping its worst,
But what was their magic to me?
Or the charm of the midsummer skies?
I only saw she was there,
A dream of the sea in her eyes
And the kiss of the sea in her hair.

I watched her vanish in space;
  She came where I walked no more;
But something had passed of her grace
  To the spell of the wave and the shore;
And now, as the glad stars rise,
  She comes to me, rosy and rare,
The delight of the wind in her eyes
  And the hand of the wind in her hair.

1872

II

LIFE is bitter. All the faces of the years,
Young and old, are gray with travail and with tears.
Must we only wake to toil, to tire, to weep?
In the sun, among the leaves, upon the flowers,
Slumber stills to dreamy death the heavy hours . . .
Let me sleep.

Riches won but mock the old, unable years;
Fame's a pearl that hides beneath a sea of tears;
Love must wither, or must live alone and weep.
In the sunshine, through the leaves, across the flowers,
While we slumber, death approaches through the hours . . .
Let me sleep.

1872

III

O, GATHER me the rose, the rose,
While yet in flower we find it,
For summer smiles, but summer goes,
And winter waits behind it!

For with the dream foregone, foregone,
The deed forborne for ever,
The worm, regret, will canker on,
And Time will turn him never.

So well it were to love, my love,
And cheat of any laughter
The fate beneath us and above,
The dark before and after.

The myrtle and the rose, the rose,
The sunshine and the swallow,
The dream that comes, the wish that goes,
The memories that follow!

1874

IV

I. M.

R. T. HAMILTON BRUCE

(1846-1899)

OUT of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

1875

V

I AM the Reaper.
All things with heedful hook
Silent I gather.
Pale roses touched with the spring,
Tall corn in summer,
Fruits rich with autumn, and frail
winter blossoms—
Reaping, still reaping—
All things with heedful hook
Timely I gather.

I am the Sower.
All the unbodied life
Runs through my seed-sheet.
Atom with atom wed,
Each quickening the other,
Fall through my hands, ever changing,
still changeless.
Ceaselessly sowing,
Life, incorruptible life,
Flows from my seed-sheet.

Maker and breaker,
I am the ebb and the flood,
Here and Hereafter.
Sped through the tangle and coil
Of infinite nature,
Viewless and soundless I fashion all being.
Taker and giver,
I am the womb and the grave,
The Now and the Ever.

1875

VI

PRAISE the generous gods for giving
In a world of wrath and strife,
With a little time for living,
Unto all the joy of life.

At whatever source we drink it,
Art or love or faith or wine,
In whatever terms we think it,
It is common and divine.

Praise the high gods, for in giving
This to man, and this alone,
They have made his chance of living
Shine the equal of their own.

1875

VII

FILL a glass with golden wine,
And the while your lips are wet
Set their perfume unto mine,
And forget,
Every kiss we take and give
Leaves us less of life to live.

Yet again! Your whim and mine
In a happy while have met.
All your sweets to me resign,
Nor regret
That we press with every breath,
Sighed or singing, nearer death.

1875

VIII

WE'LL go no more a-roving by the light of
the moon.
November glooms are barren beside the
dusk of June.
The summer flowers are faded, the summer
thoughts are sere.
We'll go no more a-roving, lest worse
befall, my dear.

We'll go no more a-roving by the light of
the moon.
The song we sang rings hollow, and heavy
runs the tune.
Glad ways and words remembered would
shame the wretched year.
We'll go no more a-roving, nor dream we
did, my dear.

We'll go no more a-roving by the light of
the moon.
If yet we walk together, we need not shun
the moon.
No sweet thing left to savour, no sad thing
left to fear,
We'll go no more a-roving, but weep at
home, my dear.

1875

IX

To W. R.

MADAM LIFE 'S a piece in bloom
  Death goes dogging everywhere:
She 's the tenant of the room,
  He 's the ruffian on the stair.

You shall see her as a friend,
  You shall bilk him once and twice;
But he 'll trap you in the end,
  And he 'll stick you for her price.

With his kneebones at your chest,
  And his knuckles in your throat,
You would reason—plead—protest!
  Clutching at her petticoat;

But she 's heard it all before,
  Well she knows you 've had your fun,
Gingerly she gains the door,
  And your little job is done.

1877

X

THE sea is full of wandering foam,
The sky of driving cloud;
My restless thoughts among them roam...
The night is dark and loud.

Where are the hours that came to me
So beautiful and bright?
A wild wind shakes the wilder sea...
O, dark and loud's the night!

1876

XI

To W. R.

THICK is the darkness—
  Sunward, O, sunward!
Rough is the highway—
  Onward, still onward!

Dawn harbours surely
  East of the shadows.
Facing us somewhere
  Spread the sweet meadows.

Upward and forward!
  Time will restore us
Light is above us,
  Rest is before us.

1876

XII

To me at my fifth-floor window
  The chimney-pots in rows
Are sets of pipes pandean
  For every wind that blows;

And the smoke that whirls and eddies
  In a thousand times and keys
Is really a visible music
  Set to my reveries.

O monstrous pipes, melodious
  With fitful tune and dream,
The clouds are your only audience,
  Her thought is your only theme!

1875

XIII

Bring her again, O western wind,
Over the western sea:
Gentle and good and fair and kind,
Bring her again to me!

Not that her fancy holds me dear,
Not that a hope may be:
Only that I may know her near,
Wind of the western sea.

1875

XIV

THE wan sun westers, faint and slow;
The eastern distance glimmers gray;
An eerie haze comes creeping low
Across the little, lonely bay;
And from the sky-line far away
About the quiet heaven are spread
Mysterious hints of dying day,
Thin, delicate dreams of green and red.

And weak, reluctant surges lap
And rustle round and down the strand.
No other sound . . . If it should hap,
The ship that sails from fairy-land!
The silken shrouds with spells are manned,
The hull is magically scrolled,
The squat mast lives, and in the sand
The gold prow-griffin claws a hold.

It steals to seaward silently;
Strange fish-folk follow thro' the gloom;
Great wings flap overhead; I see
The Castle of the Drowsy Doom
Vague thro' the changeless twilight loom,
Enchanted, hushed. And ever there
She slumbers in eternal bloom,
Her cushions hid with golden hair.

1875

XV

THERE is a wheel inside my head
Of wantonness and wine,
An old, cracked fiddle is begging without,
But the wind with scents of the sea is fed,
And the sun seems glad to shine.

The sun and the wind are akin to you,
As you are akin to June.
But the fiddle! . . . It giggles and twitters about,
And, love and laughter! who gave him the cue?—
He 's playing your favourite tune.

1875

XVI

WHILE the west is paling
  Starshine is begun.
While the dusk is failing
  Glimmers up the sun,

So, till darkness cover
  Life's retreating gleam,
Lover follows lover,
  Dream succeeds to dream.

Stoop to my endeavour,
  O my love, and be
Only and for ever
  Sun and stars to me.

1876

XVII

THE sands are alive with sunshine,
The bathers lounge and throng,
And out in the bay a bugle
Is lilting a gallant song.

The clouds go racing eastward,
The blithe wind cannot rest,
And a shard on the shingle flashes
Like the shining soul of a jest;

While children romp in the surges,
And sweethearts wander free,
And the Firth as with laughter dimples . . .
I would it were deep over me!

1875

XVIII

To A. D.

THE nightingale has a lyre of gold,
The lark's is a clarion call,
And the blackbird plays but a boxwood flute,
But I love him best of all.

For his song is all of the joy of life,
And we in the mad, spring weather,
We two have listened till he sang
Our hearts and lips together.

1876

XIX

Your heart has trembled to my tongue,
Your hands in mine have lain,
Your thought to me has leaned and clung,
Again and yet again,
My dear,
Again and yet again.

Now die the dream, or come the wife,
The past is not in vain,
For wholly as it was your life
Can never be again,
My dear,
Can never be again.

1876

XX

THE surges gushed and sounded,
The blue was the blue of June,
And low above the brightening east
Floated a shred of moon.

The woods were black and solemn,
The night winds large and free,
And in your thought a blessing seemed
To fall on land and sea.

1877

XXI

We flash across the level.
  We thunder thro' the bridges.
We bicker down the cuttings.
  We sway along the ridges.

A rush of streaming hedges,
  Of jostling lights and shadows,
Of hurtling, hurrying stations,
  Of racing woods and meadows.

We charge the tunnels headlong—
  The blackness roars and shatters.
We crash between embankments—
  The open spins and scatters.

We shake off the miles like water,
  We might carry a royal ransom;
And I think of her waiting, waiting,
  And long for a common hansom.

1876

XXII

THE West a glimmering lake of light,
A dream of pearly weather,
The first of stars is burning white—
The star we watch together.
Is April dead? The unresting year
Will shape us our September,
And April's work is done, my dear—
Do you not remember?

O gracious eve! O happy star,
Still-flashing, glowing, sinking!—
Who lives of lovers near or far
So glad as I in thinking?
The gallant world is warm and green,
For May fulfils November.
When lights and leaves and loves have been,
Sweet, will you remember?

O star benignant and serene,
I take the good to-morrow,
That fills from verge to verge my dream,
With all its joy and sorrow!
The old, sweet spell is unforgot
That turns to June December;
And, tho' the world remembered not,
Love, we would remember.

1876

XXIII

THE skies are strown with stars,
The streets are fresh with dew,
A thin moon drifts to westward,
The night is hushed and cheerful:
My thought is quick with you.

Near windows gleam and laugh,
And far away a train
Clanks glowing through the stillness:
A great content 's in all things,
And life is not in vain.

1877

XXIV

THE full sea rolls and thunders
In glory and in glee.
O, bury me not in the senseless earth
But in the living sea!

Ay, bury me where it surges
A thousand miles from shore,
And in its brotherly unrest
I 'll range for evermore.

1876

XXV

In the year that 's come and gone, love, his flying feather
Stooping slowly, gave us heart, and bade us walk together.
In the year that 's coming on, though many a troth be broken,
We at least will not forget aught that love hath spoken.

In the year that 's come and gone, dear, we wove a tether
All of gracious words and thoughts, binding two together.
In the year that 's coming on with its wealth of roses
We shall weave it stronger yet, ere the circle closes.

In the year that's come and gone, in the golden weather,
Sweet, my sweet, we swore to keep the watch of life together.
In the year that's coming on, rich in joy and sorrow,
We shall light our lamp, and wait life's mysterious morrow.

1877

XXVI

In the placid summer midnight,
Under the drowsy sky,
I seem to hear in the stillness
The moths go glimmering by.

One by one from the windows
The lights have all been sped.
Never a blind looks conscious—
The street is asleep in bed!

But I come where a living casement
Laughs luminous and wide;
I hear the song of a piano
Break in a sparkling tide;

And I feel, in the waltz that frolics
And warbles swift and clear,
A sudden sense of shelter
And friendliness and cheer . . .

A sense of tinkling glasses,
  Of love and laughter and light—
The piano stops, and the window
  Stares blank out into the night.

The blind goes out, and I wander
  To the old, unfriendly sea,
The lonelier for the memory
  That walks like a ghost with me.

XXVII

SHE sauntered by the swinging seas,
A jewel glittered at her ear,
And, teasing her along, the breeze
Brought many a rounded grace more near.

So passing, one with wave and beam,
She left for memory to caress
A laughing thought, a golden gleam,
A hint of hidden loveliness.

1876

XXVIII

To S. C.

BLITHE dreams arise to greet us,
And life feels clean and new,
For the old love comes to meet us
In the dawning and the dew.
O'erblown with sunny shadows,
O'ersped with winds at play,
The woodlands and the meadows
Are keeping holiday.
Wild foals are scampering, neighing,
Brave merles their hautboys blow:
Come! let us go a-maying
As in the Long-Ago.

Here we but peak and dwindle:
The clank of chain and crane,
The whir of crank and spindle
Bewilder heart and brain;

The ends of our endeavour
Are merely wealth and fame,
Yet in the still Forever
We're one and all the same;
Delaying, still delaying,
We watch the fading west:
Come! let us go a-maying,
Nor fear to take the best.

Yet beautiful and spacious
The wise, old world appears.
Yet frank and fair and gracious
Outlaugh the jocund years.
Our arguments disputing,
The universal Pan
Still wanders fluting—fluting—
Fluting to maid and man.
Our weary well-a-waying
His music cannot still:
Come! let us go a-maying,
And pipe with him our fill.

Where wanton winds are flowing
Among the gladdening grass;

Where hawthorn brakes are blowing,
  And meadow perfumes pass;
Where morning's grace is greenest,
  And fullest noon's of pride;
Where sunset spreads serenest,
  And sacred night's most wide;
Where nests are swaying, swaying,
  And spring's fresh voices call,
Come! let us go a-maying,
  And bless the God of all!

1878

XXIX

To R. L. S.

A CHILD,
Curious and innocent,
Slips from his Nurse, and rejoicing
Loses himself in the Fair.

Thro' the jostle and din
Wandering, he revels,
Dreaming, desiring, possessing;
Till, of a sudden
Tired and afraid, he beholds
The sordid assemblage
Just as it is; and he runs
With a sob to his Nurse
(Lighting at last on him),
And in her motherly bosom
Cries him to sleep.

Thus thro' the World,
Seeing and feeling and knowing,
Goes Man: till at last,
Tired of experience, he turns
To the friendly and comforting breast
Of the old nurse, Death.

1876

XXX

KATE-A-WHIMSIES, John-a-Dreams,
Still debating, still delay,
And the world 's a ghost that gleams—
Wavers—vanishes away!

We must live while live we can;
We should love while love we may.
Dread in women, doubt in man . . .
So the Infinite runs away.

1876

XXXI

O, HAVE you blessed, behind the stars,
The blue sheen in the skies,
When June the roses round her calls?—
Then do you know the light that falls
From her belovèd eyes.

And have you felt the sense of peace
That morning meadows give?—
Then do you know the spirit of grace,
The angel abiding in her face,
Who makes it good to live.

She shines before me, hope and dream,
So fair, so still, so wise,
That, winning her, I seem to win
Out of the dust and drive and din
A nook of Paradise.

1877

XXXII

To D. H.

O, FALMOUTH is a fine town with ships in the bay,
And I wish from my heart it's there I was to-day;
I wish from my heart I was far away from here,
Sitting in my parlour and talking to my dear.

For it's home, dearie, home—it's home I want to be.
Our topsails are hoisted, and we'll away to sea.
O, the oak and the ash and the bonnie birken tree
They're all growing green in the old countrie.

In Baltimore a-walking a lady I did meet
With her babe on her arm, as she came
down the street;
And I thought how I sailed, and the cradle
standing ready
For the pretty little babe that has never
seen its daddie.
And it's home, dearie, home . . .

O, if it be a lass, she shall wear a golden
ring;
And if it be a lad, he shall fight for his
king:
With his dirk and his hat and his little
jacket blue
He shall walk the quarter-deck as his
daddie used to do.
And it's home, dearie, home . . .

O, there's a wind a-blowing, a-blowing from
the west,
And that of all the winds is the one I like
the best,

For it blows at our backs, and it shakes our
pennon free,
And it soon will blow us home to the old
countrie.
For it 's home, dearie, home—it 's home
I want to be.
Our topsails are hoisted, and we 'll away
to sea.
O, the oak and the ash and the bonnie
birken tree
They 're all growing green in the old
countrie.

1878

NOTE.—The burthen and the third stanza are old.

XXXIII

THE ways are green with the gladdening sheen
Of the young year's fairest daughter.
O, the shadows that fleet o'er the springing wheat!
O, the magic of running water!
The spirit of spring is in every thing,
The banners of spring are streaming,
We march to a tune from the fifes of June,
And life's a dream worth dreaming.

It's all very well to sit and spell
At the lesson there's no gainsaying;
But what the deuce are wont and use
When the whole mad world's a-maying?
When the meadow glows, and the orchard snows,
And the air's with love-motes teeming,
When fancies break, and the senses wake,
O, life's a dream worth dreaming!

What Nature has writ with her lusty wit
  Is worded so wisely and kindly
That whoever has dipped in her manuscript
  Must up and follow her blindly.
Now the summer prime is her blithest rhyme
  In the being and the seeming,
And they that have heard the overword
  Know life's a dream worth dreaming.

1878

XXXIV

To K. DE M.

Love blows as the wind blows,
Love blows into the heart.—NILE BOAT-SONG.

LIFE in her creaking shoes
Goes, and more formal grows,
A round of calls and cues:
Love blows as the wind blows.
Blows! . . . in the quiet close
As in the roaring mart,
By ways no mortal knows
Love blows into the heart.

The stars some cadence use,
Forthright the river flows,
In order fall the dews,
Love blows as the wind blows:
Blows! . . . and what reckoning shows
The courses of his chart?
A spirit that comes and goes,
Love blows into the heart.

1878

XXXV

I. M.

MARGARITÆ SORORIS

(1886)

A LATE lark twitters from the quiet skies;
And from the west,
Where the sun, his day's work ended,
Lingers as in content,
There falls on the old, gray city
An influence luminous and serene,
A shining peace.

The smoke ascends
In a rosy-and-golden haze. The spires
Shine, and are changed. In the valley
Shadows rise. The lark sings on. The sun,
Closing his benediction,

Sinks, and the darkening air
Thrills with a sense of the triumphing
night—
Night with her train of stars
And her great gift of sleep.

So be my passing!
My task accomplished and the long day
done,
My wages taken, and in my heart
Some late lark singing,
Let me be gathered to the quiet west,
The sundown splendid and serene,
Death.

1876

XXXVI

I GAVE my heart to a woman—
I gave it her, branch and root.
She bruised, she wrung, she tortured
She cast it under foot.

Under her feet she cast it,
She trampled it where it fell,
She broke it all to pieces,
And each was a clot of hell.

There in the rain and the sunshine
They lay and smouldered long;
And each, when again she viewed them,
Had turned to a living song.

XXXVII

To W. A.

Or ever the knightly years were gone
With the old world to the grave,
I was a King in Babylon
And you were a Christian Slave.

I saw, I took, I cast you by,
I bent and broke your pride.
You loved me well, or I heard them lie,
But your longing was denied.
Surely I knew that by and by
You cursed your gods and died.

And a myriad suns have set and shone
Since then upon the grave
Decreed by the King in Babylon
To her that had been his Slave.

The pride I trampled is now my scathe,
For it tramples me again.

The old resentment lasts like death,
For you love, yet you refrain.
I break my heart on your hard unfaith,
And I break my heart in vain.

Yet not for an hour do I wish undone
The deed beyond the grave,
When I was a King in Babylon
And you were a Virgin Slave.

XXXVIII

On the way to Kew,
By the river old and gray,
Where in the Long Ago
We laughed and loitered so,
I met a ghost to-day,
A ghost that told of you—
A ghost of low replies
And sweet, inscrutable eyes
Coming up from Richmond
As you used to do.

By the river old and gray,
The enchanted Long Ago
Murmured and smiled anew.
On the way to Kew,
March had the laugh of May,
The bare boughs looked aglow,
And old, immortal words
Sang in my breast like birds,
Coming up from Richmond
As I used with you.

With the life of Long Ago
Lived my thought of you.
By the river old and gray
Flowing his appointed way
As I watched I knew
What is so good to know—
Not in vain, not in vain,
Shall I look for you again
Coming up from Richmond
On the way to Kew.

XXXIX

THE Past was goodly once, and yet, when all
is said,
The best of it we know is that it 's done and
dead.

Dwindled and faded quite, perished beyond
recall,
Nothing is left at last of what one time was
all.

Coming back like a ghost, staring and
lingering on,
Never a word it speaks but proves it dead
and gone.

Duty and work and joy—these things it
cannot give ;
And the Present is life, and life is good to
live.

Let it lie where it fell, far from the living
sun,
The Past that, goodly once, is gone and dead
and done.

XL

THE spring, my dear,
Is no longer spring.
Does the blackbird sing
What he sang last year?
Are the skies the old
Immemorial blue?
Or am I, or are you,
Grown cold?

Though life be change,
It is hard to bear
When the old sweet air
Sounds forced and strange.
To be out of tune,
Plain You and I . . .
It were better to die,
And soon!

XLI

To R. A. M. S.

The Spirit of Wine
Sang in my glass, and I listened
With love to his odorous music,
His flushed and magnificent song.

——'I am health, I am heart, I am life!
For I give for the asking
The fire of my father, the Sun,
And the strength of my mother, the Earth.
Inspiration in essence,
I am wisdom and wit to the wise,
His visible muse to the poet,
The soul of desire to the lover,
The genius of laughter to all.

'Come, lean on me, ye that are weary!
Rise, ye faint-hearted and doubting!
Haste, ye that lag by the way!
I am Pride, the consoler;

Valour and Hope are my henchmen;
I am the Angel of Rest.

'I am life, I am wealth, I am fame:
For I captain an army
Of shining and generous dreams;
And mine, too, all mine, are the keys
Of that secret spiritual shrine,
Where, his work-a-day soul put by,
Shut in with his saint of saints—
With his radiant and conquering self—
Man worships, and talks, and is glad.

'Come, sit with me, ye that are lonely,
Ye that are paid with disdain,
Ye that are chained and would soar!
I am beauty and love;
I am friendship, the comforter;
I am that which forgives and forgets.'——

The Spirit of Wine
Sang in my heart, and I triumphed
In the savour and scent of his music,
His magnetic and mastering song.

[redacted]

XLIII

FRIENDS . . old friends . . .
One sees how it ends.
A woman looks
Or a man tells lies,
And the pleasant brooks
And the quiet skies,
Ruined with brawling
And caterwauling,
Enchant no more
As they did before.
And so it ends
With friends.

Friends . . old friends . . .
And what if it ends?
Shall we dare to shirk
What we live to learn?
It has done its work,
It has served its turn;
And, forgive and forget
Or hanker and fret,

We can be no more
As we were before.
When it ends, it ends
With friends.

Friends . . old friends . . .
So it breaks, so it ends.
There let it rest!
It has fought and won,
And is still the best
That either has done.
Each as he stands
The work of its hands,
Which shall be more
As he was before? . . .
What is it ends
With friends?

XLIV

If it should come to be,
This proof of you and me,
    This type and sign
Of hours that smiled and shone,
And yet seemed dead and gone
    As old-world wine:

Of Them Within the Gate
Ask we no richer fate,
    No boon above,
For girl child or for boy,
My gift of life and joy,
    Your gift of love.

XLV

To W. B. B.

FROM the brake the Nightingale
Sings exulting to the Rose;
Though he sees her waxing pale
In her passionate repose,
While she triumphs waxing frail,
Fading even while she glows;
Though he knows
How it goes—
Knows of last year's Nightingale
Dead with last year's Rose.

Wise the enamoured Nightingale,
Wise the well-belovèd Rose!
Love and life shall still prevail,
Nor the silence at the close
Break the magic of the tale
In the telling, though it shows—

Who but knows
How it goes!—
Life a last year's Nightingale,
Love a last year's Rose.

XLVI

MATRI DILECTISSIMÆ

I. M.

In the waste hour
Between to-day and yesterday
We watched, while on my arm—
Living flesh of her flesh, bone of her bone—
Dabbled in sweat the sacred head
Lay uncomplaining, still, contemptuous, strange:
Till the dear face turned dead,
And to a sound of lamentation
The good, heroic soul with all its wealth—
Its sixty years of love and sacrifice,
Suffering and passionate faith—was re-absorbed
In the inexorable Peace,
And life was changed to us for evermore.

Was nothing left of her but tears
Like blood-drops from the heart?

Nought save remorse
For duty unfulfilled, justice undone,
And charity ignored? Nothing but love,
Forgiveness, reconcilement, where in truth,
But for this passing
Into the unimaginable abyss
These things had never been?

Nay, there were we,
Her five strong sons!
To her Death came—the great Deliverer came!—
As equal comes to equal, throne to throne.
She was a mother of men.

The stars shine as of old. The unchanging River,
Bent on his errand of immortal law,
Works his appointed way
To the immemorial sea.
And the brave truth comes overwhelmingly home:—
That she in us yet works and shines,
Lives and fulfils herself,
Unending as the river and the stars.

Dearest, live on
In such an immortality
As we thy sons,
Born of thy body and nursed
At those wild, faithful breasts,
Can give—of generous thoughts,
And honourable words, and deeds
That make men half in love with fate!
Live on, O brave and true,
In us thy children, in ours whose life is thine—
Our best and theirs! What is that best
but thee—
Thee, and thy gift to us, to pass
Like light along the infinite of space
To the immitigable end?

Between the river and the stars,
O royal and radiant soul,
Thou dost return, thine influences return
Upon thy children as in life, and death
Turns stingless! What is Death
But Life in act? How should the Unteeming Grave
Be victor over thee,
Mother, a mother of men?

XLVII

Crosses and troubles a-many have proved me.
One or two women (God bless them!) have loved me.
I have worked and dreamed, and I've talked at will.
Of art and drink I have had my fill.
I've comforted here, and I've succoured there.
I've faced my foes, and I've backed my friends.
I've blundered, and sometimes made amends.
I have prayed for light, and I've known despair.
Now I look before, as I look behind,
Come storm, come shine, whatever befall,
With a grateful heart and a constant mind,
For the end I know is the best of all.

1888-1889

RHYMES
AND RHYTHMS

1889-1892

PROLOGUE

Something is dead . . .
The grace of sunset solitudes, the march
Of the solitary moon, the pomp and power
Of round on round of shining soldier-stars
Patrolling space, the bounties of the sun—
Sovran, tremendous, unimaginable—
The multitudinous friendliness of the sea,
Possess no more—no more.

Something is dead . . .
The Autumn rain-rot deeper and wider soaks
And spreads, the burden of Winter heavier
weighs,
His melancholy close and closer yet
Cleaves, and those incantations of the Spring
That made the heart a centre of miracles
Grow formal, and the wonder-working hours
Arise no more—no more.

Something is dead . . .
'Tis time to creep in close about the fire
And tell gray tales of what we were, and dream
Old dreams and faded, and as we may rejoice
In the young life that round us leaps and laughs,
A fountain in the sunshine, in the pride
Of God's best gift that to us twain returns,
Dear Heart, no more—no more.

I

To H. B. M. W.

WHERE forlorn sunsets flare and fade
On desolate sea and lonely sand,
Out of the silence and the shade
What is the voice of strange command
Calling you still, as friend calls friend
With love that cannot brook delay,
To rise and follow the ways that wend
Over the hills and far away?

Hark in the city, street on street
A roaring reach of death and life,
Of vortices that clash and fleet
And ruin in appointed strife,
Hark to it calling, calling clear,
Calling until you cannot stay
From dearer things than your own most dear
Over the hills and far away.

Out of the sound of the ebb-and-flow,
  Out of the sight of lamp and star,
It calls you where the good winds blow,
  And the unchanging meadows are:
From faded hopes and hopes agleam,
  It calls you, calls you night and day
Beyond the dark into the dream
  Over the hills and far away.

II

To R. F. B.

WE are the Choice of the Will: God, when
He gave the word
That called us into line, set in our hand a
sword;

Set us a sword to wield none else could lift
and draw,
And bade us forth to the sound of the
trumpet of the Law.

East and west and north, wherever the
battle grew,
As men to a feast we fared, the work of the
Will to do.

Bent upon vast beginnings, bidding anarchy
cease—
(Had we hacked it to the Pit, we had left it
a place of peace!)—

Marching, building, sailing, pillar of cloud or fire,
Sons of the Will, we fought the fight of the Will, our sire.

Road was never so rough that we left its purpose dark;
Stark was ever the sea, but our ships were yet more stark;

We tracked the winds of the world to the steps of their very thrones;
The secret parts of the world were salted with our bones;

Till now the name of names, England, the name of might,
Flames from the austral fires to the bounds of the boreal night;

And the call of her morning drum goes in a girdle of sound,
Like the voice of the sun in song, the great globe round and round;

And the shadow of her flag, when it shouts
to the mother-breeze,
Floats from shore to shore of the universal
seas;

And the loneliest death is fair with a
memory of her flowers,
And the end of the road to Hell with the
sense of her dews and showers!

Who says that we shall pass, or the fame of
us fade and die,
While the living stars fulfil their round in
the living sky?

For the sire lives in his sons, and they pay
their father's debt,
And the Lion has left a whelp wherever his
claw was set;

And the Lion in his whelps, his whelps that
none shall brave,
Is but less strong than Time and the great,
all-whelming Grave.

III

A DESOLATE shore,
The sinister seduction of the Moon,
The menace of the irreclaimable Sea.

Flaunting, tawdry and grim,
From cloud to cloud along her beat,
Leering her battered and inveterate leer,
She signals where he prowls in the dark alone,
Her horrible old man,
Mumbling old oaths and warming
His villainous old bones with villainous talk—
The secrets of their grisly housekeeping
Since they went out upon the pad
In the first twilight of self-conscious Time:
Growling, hideous and hoarse,
Tales of unnumbered Ships,
Goodly and strong, Companions of the Advance,
In some vile alley of the night

Waylaid and bludgeoned—
Dead.

Deep cellared in primeval ooze,
Ruined, dishonoured, spoiled,
They lie where the lean water-worm
Crawls free of their secrets, and their broken sides
Bulge with the slime of life. Thus they abide,
Thus fouled and desecrate,
The summons of the Trumpet, and the while
These Twain, their murderers,
Unravined, imperturbable, unsubdued,
Hang at the heels of their children—She aloft
As in the shining streets,
He as in ambush at some accomplice door.

The stalwart Ships,
The beautiful and bold adventurers!
Stationed out yonder in the isle,
The tall Policeman,
Flashing his bull's-eye, as he peers
About him in the ancient vacancy,
Tells them this way is safety—this way home.

IV

It came with the threat of a waning moon
And the wail of an ebbing tide,
But many a woman has lived for less,
And many a man has died;
For life upon life took hold and passed,
Strong in a fate set free,
Out of the deep into the dark
On for the years to be.

Between the gleam of a waning moon
And the song of an ebbing tide,
Chance upon chance of love and death
Took wing for the world so wide.
O, leaf out of leaf is the way of the land,
Wave out of wave of the sea,
And who shall reckon what lives may live
In the life that we bade to be?

V

WHY, my heart, do we love her so?
(Geraldine, Geraldine!)
Why does the great sea ebb and flow?—
Why does the round world spin?
Geraldine, Geraldine,
Bid me my life renew:
What is it worth unless I win,
Love—love and you?

Why, my heart, when we speak her name
(Geraldine, Geraldine!)
Throbs the word like a flinging flame?—
Why does the Spring begin?
Geraldine, Geraldine,
Bid me indeed to be:
Open your heart, and take us in,
Love—love and me.

VI

ONE with the ruined sunset,
The strange forsaken sands,
What is it waits, and wanders,
And signs with desperate hands?

What is it calls in the twilight—
Calls as its chance were vain?
The cry of a gull sent seaward
Or the voice of an ancient pain?

The red ghost of the sunset,
It walks them as its own,
These dreary and desolate reaches . . .
But O, that it walked alone!

VII

THERE 's a regret
So grinding, so immitigably sad,
Remorse thereby feels tolerant, even glad....
Do you not know it yet ?

For deeds undone
Rankle and snarl and hunger for their due,
Till there seems naught so despicable as you
In all the grin o' the sun.

Like an old shoe
The sea spurns and the land abhors, you lie
About the beach of Time, till by and by
Death, that derides you too—

Death, as he goes
His ragman's round, espies you, where you stray,
With half-an-eye, and kicks you out of his way;
And then—and then, who knows

But the kind Grave
Turns on you, and you feel the convict Worm,
In that black bridewell working out his term,
Hanker and grope and crave?

'Poor fool that might—
That might, yet would not, dared not, let this be,
Think of it, here and thus made over to me
In the implacable night!'

And writhing, fain
And like a triumphing lover, he shall take
His fill where no high memory lives to make
His obscene victory vain.

VIII

To A. J. H.

TIME and the Earth—
The old Father and Mother—
Their teeming accomplished,
Their purpose fulfilled,
Close with a smile
For a moment of kindness,
Ere for the winter
They settle to sleep.

Failing yet gracious,
Slow pacing, soon homing,
A patriarch that strolls
Through the tents of his children,
The Sun, as he journeys
His round on the lower
Ascents of the blue,
Washes the roofs

And the hillsides with clarity;
Charms the dark pools
Till they break into pictures;
Scatters magnificent
Alms to the beggar trees;
Touches the mist-folk,
That crowd to his escort,
Into translucencies
Radiant and ravishing:
As with the visible
Spirit of Summer
Gloriously vaporised,
Visioned in gold!

Love, though the fallen leaf
Mark, and the fleeting light
And the loud, loitering
Footfall of darkness
Sign to the heart
Of the passage of destiny,
Here is the ghost
Of a summer that lived for us,
Here is a promise
Of summers to be.

IX

'As like the Woman as you can'—
(*Thus the New Adam was beguiled*)—
'So shall you touch the Perfect Man'—
(*God in the Garden heard and smiled*).
'Your father perished with his day:
'A clot of passions fierce and blind,
'He fought, he hacked, he crushed his way:
'Your muscles, Child, must be of mind.

'The Brute that lurks and irks within,
'How, till you have him gagged and bound,
'Escape the foullest form of Sin?'
(*God in the Garden laughed and frowned*).
'So vile, so rank, the bestial mood
'In which the race is bid to be,
'It wrecks the Rarer Womanhood:
'Live, therefore, you, for Purity!

'Take for your mate no gallant croup,
'No girl all grace and natural will:
'To work her mission were to stoop,
'Maybe to lapse, from Well to Ill.
'Choose one of whom your grosser make'—
(*God in the Garden laughed outright*)—
'The true refining touch may take,
'Till both attain to Life's last height.

'There, equal, purged of soul and sense,
'Beneficent, high-thinking, just,
'Beyond the appeal of Violence,
'Incapable of common Lust,
'In mental Marriage still prevail'—
(*God in the Garden hid His face*)—
'Till you achieve that Female-Male
'In Which shall culminate the race.'

X

MIDSUMMER midnight skies,
Midsummer midnight influences and airs,
The shining, sensitive silver of the sea
Touched with the strange-hued blazonings
of dawn;
And all so solemnly still I seem to hear
The breathing of Life and Death,
The secular Accomplices,
Renewing the visible miracle of the world.

The wistful stars
Shine like good memories. The young
morning wind
Blows full of unforgotten hours
As over a region of roses. Life and Death
Sound on—sound on. . . . And the night
magical,
Troubled yet comforting, thrills
As if the Enchanted Castle at the heart

Of the wood's dark wonderment
Swung wide his valves, and filled the dim sea-banks
With exquisite visitants:
Words fiery-hearted yet, dreams and desires
With living looks intolerable, regrets
Whose voice comes as the voice of an only child
Heard from the grave: shapes of a Might-Have-Been—
Beautiful, miserable, distraught—
The Law no man may baffle denied and slew.

The spell-bound ships stand as at gaze
To let the marvel by. The gray road glooms . . .
Glimmers . . . goes out . . . and there, O, there where it fades,
What grace, what glamour, what wild will,
Transfigure the shadows? Whose,
Heart of my heart, Soul of my soul, but yours?

Ghosts—ghosts—the sapphirine air
Teems with them even to the gleaming ends
Of the wild day-spring! Ghosts,
Everywhere—everywhere—till I and you
At last—dear love, at last!—
Are in the dreaming, even as Life and
Death,
Twin-ministers of the unoriginal Will.

XI

Gulls in an aëry morrice
  Gleam and vanish and gleam . . .
The full sea, sleepily basking,
  Dreams under skies of dream.

Gulls in an aëry morrice
  Circle and swoop and close . . .
Fuller and ever fuller
  The rose of the morning blows.

Gulls, in an aëry morrice
  Frolicking, float and fade . . .
O, the way of a bird in the sunshine,
  The way of a man with a maid!

XII

SOME starlit garden gray with dew,
Some chamber flushed with wine and fire,
What matters where, so I and you
Are worthy our desire?

Behind, a past that scolds and jeers
For ungirt loins and lamps unlit;
In front, the unmanageable years,
The trap upon the Pit;

Think on the shame of dreams for deeds,
The scandal of unnatural strife,
The slur upon immortal needs,
The treason done to life:

Arise! no more a living lie,
And with me quicken and control
Some memory that shall magnify
The universal Soul.

XIII

To JAMES McNEILL WHISTLER

UNDER a stagnant sky,
Gloom out of gloom uncoiling into gloom,
The River, jaded and forlorn,
Welters and wanders wearily—wretchedly—
on;
Yet in and out among the ribs
Of the old skeleton bridge, as in the piles
Of some dead lake-built city, full of skulls,
Worm-worn, rat-riddled, mouldy with
memories,
Lingers to babble to a broken tune
(Once, O, the unvoiced music of my heart!)
So melancholy a soliloquy
It sounds as it might tell
The secret of the unending grief-in-grain,
The terror of Time and Change and Death,
That wastes this floating, transitory world.

What of the incantation
That forced the huddled shapes on yonder shore
To take and wear the night
Like a material majesty?
That touched the shafts of wavering fire
About this miserable welter and wash—
(River, O River of Journeys, River of Dreams!)—
Into long, shining signals from the panes
Of an enchanted pleasure-house,
Where life and life might live life lost in life
For ever and evermore?

O Death! O Change! O Time!
Without you, O, the insufferable eyes
Of these poor Might-Have-Beens,
These fatuous, ineffectual Yesterdays!

XIV

To J. A. C.

FRESH from his fastnesses
Wholesome and spacious,
The North Wind, the mad huntsman,
Halloas on his white hounds
Over the gray, roaring
Reaches and ridges,
The forest of ocean,
The chace of the world.
Hark to the peal
Of the pack in full cry,
As he thongs them before him,
Swarming voluminous,
Weltering, wide-wallowing,
Till in a ruining
Chaos of energy,
Hurled on their quarry,
They crash into foam!

Old Indefatigable,
Time's right-hand man, the sea
Laughs as in joy
From his millions of wrinkles:
Laughs that his destiny,
Great with the greatness
Of triumphing order,
Shows as a dwarf
By the strength of his heart
And the might of his hands.

Master of masters,
O maker of heroes,
Thunder the brave,
Irresistible message:—
'Life is worth Living
Through every grain of it,
From the foundations
To the last edge
Of the cornerstone, death.

XV

You played and sang a snatch of song,
A song that all-too well we knew;
But whither had flown the ancient wrong;
And was it really I and you?
O, since the end of life's to live
And pay in pence the common debt,
What should it cost us to forgive
Whose daily task is to forget?

You babbled in the well-known voice—
Not new, not new the words you said.
You touched me off that famous poise,
That old effect, of neck and head.
Dear, was it really you and I?
In truth the riddle's ill to read,
So many are the deaths we die
Before we can be dead indeed.

XVI

SPACE and dread and the dark—
Over a livid stretch of sky
Cloud-monsters crawling, like a funeral train
Of huge, primeval presences
Stooping beneath the weight
Of some enormous, rudimentary grief;
While in the haunting loneliness
The far sea waits and wanders with a sound
As of the trailing skirts of Destiny,
Passing unseen
To some immitigable end
With her gray henchman, Death.

What larve, what spectre is this
Thrilling the wilderness to life
As with the bodily shape of Fear ?
What but a desperate sense,
A strong foreboding of those dim
Interminable continents, forlorn

And many-silenced, in a dusk
Inviolable utterly, and dead
As the poor dead it huddles and swarms
and styes
In hugger-mugger through eternity?

Life—life—let there be life!
Better a thousand times the roaring hours
When wave and wind,
Like the Arch-Murderer in flight
From the Avenger at his heel,
Storm through the desolate fastnesses
And wild waste places of the world!

Life—give me life until the end,
That at the very top of being,
The battle-spirit shouting in my blood,
Out of the reddest hell of the fight
I may be snatched and flung
Into the everlasting lull,
The immortal, incommunicable dream.

XVII

CARMEN PATIBULARE

To H. S.

TREE, Old Tree of the Triple Crook
And the rope of the Black Election,
'Tis the faith of the Fool that a race you rule
Can never achieve perfection:
So 'It's O, for the time of the new Sublime
And the better than human way,
When the Rat (poor beast) shall come to his own
And the Wolf shall have his day!'

For Tree, Old Tree of the Triple Beam
And the power of provocation,
You have cockered the Brute with your dreadful fruit
Till your thought is mere stupration:

And 'It 's how should we rise to be pure and
wise,
And how can we choose but fall,
So long as the Hangman makes us dread,
And the Noose floats free for all ?'

So Tree, Old Tree of the Triple Coign
And the trick there 's no recalling,
They will haggle and hew till they hack you
through
And at last they lay you sprawling :
When 'Hey ! for the hour of the race in
flower
And the long good-bye to sin !
And the fires of Hell gone out for the lack
Of the fuel to keep them in !'

But Tree, Old Tree of the Triple Bough
And the ghastly Dreams that tend you,
Your growth began with the life of Man,
And only his death can end you.
They may tug in line at your hempen twine,
They may flourish with axe and saw ;
But your taproot drinks of the Sacred Springs
In the living rock of Law.

And Tree, Old Tree of the Triple Fork,
When the spent sun reels and blunders
Down a welkin lit with the flare of the Pit
As it seethes in spate and thunders,
Stern on the glare of the tortured air
Your lines august shall gloom,
And your master-beam be the last thing whelmed
In the ruining roar of Doom.

XVIII

I. M.

MARGARET EMMA HENLEY

(1888-1894)

WHEN you wake in your crib,
You, an inch of experience—
Vaulted about
With the wonder of darkness;
Wailing and striving
To reach from your feebleness
Something you feel
Will be good to and cherish you,
Something you know
And can rest upon blindly:
O, then a hand
(Your mother's, your mother's!)
By the fall of its fingers
All knowledge, all power to you,
Out of the dreary,
Discouraging strangenesses
Comes to and masters you,

Takes you, and lovingly
Woos you and soothes you
Back, as you cling to it,
Back to some comforting
Corner of sleep.

So you wake in your bed,
Having lived, having loved;
But the shadows are there,
And the world and its kingdoms
Incredibly faded;
And you grope through the Terror
Above you and under
For the light, for the warmth,
The assurance of life;
But the blasts are ice-born,
And your heart is nigh burst
With the weight of the gloom
And the stress of your strangled
And desperate endeavour:
Sudden a hand—
Mother, O Mother!—
God at His best to you,
Out of the roaring,
Impossible silences,

Falls on and urges you,
Mightily, tenderly,
Forth, as you clutch at it,
Forth to the infinite
Peace of the Grave.

October 1891

XIX

I. M.

R. L. S.

(1850-1894)

O, TIME and Change, they range and range
From sunshine round to thunder!—
They glance and go as the great winds blow,
And the best of our dreams drive under:
For Time and Change estrange, estrange—
And, now they have looked and seen us,
O, we that were dear, we are all-too near
With the thick of the world between us.

O, Death and Time, they chime and chime
Like bells at sunset falling!—
They end the song, they right the wrong,
They set the old echoes calling:
For Death and Time bring on the prime
Of God's own chosen weather,
And we lie in the peace of the Great Release
As once in the grass together.

February 1891

XX

THE shadow of Dawn;
Stillness and stars and over-mastering dreams
Of Life and Death and Sleep;
Heard over gleaming flats, the old, unchanging sound
Of the old, unchanging Sea.

My soul and yours—
O, hand in hand let us fare forth, two ghosts,
Into the ghostliness,
The infinite and abounding solitudes,
Beyond—O, beyond!—beyond . . .

Here in the porch
Upon the multitudinous silences
Of the kingdoms of the grave,
We twain are you and I—two ghosts Omnipotence
Can touch no more . . . no more!

XXI

TREES and the menace of night;
Then a long, lonely, leaden mere
Backed by a desolate fell,
As by a spectral battlement; and then,
Low-brooding, interpenetrating all,
A vast, gray, listless, inexpressive sky,
So beggared, so incredibly bereft
Of starlight and the song of racing worlds,
It might have bellied down upon the Void
Where as in terror Light was beginning
to be.

Hist! In the trees fulfilled of night
(Night and the wretchedness of the sky)
Is it the hurry of the rain?
Or the noise of a drive of the Dead,
Streaming before the irresistible Will
Through the strange dusk of this, the De-
bateable Land
Between their place and ours?

Like the forgetfulness
Of the work-a-day world made visible,
A mist falls from the melancholy sky.
A messenger from some lost and loving soul,
Hopeless, far wandered, dazed
Here in the provinces of life,
A great white moth fades miserably past.

Thro' the trees in the strange dead night,
Under the vast dead sky,
Forgetting and forgot, a drift of Dead
Sets to the mystic mere, the phantom fell,
And the unimagined vastitudes beyond.

XXII

To P. A. G.

HERE they trysted, here they strayed,
In the leafage dewy and boon,
Many a man and many a maid,
And the morn was merry June.
'Death is fleet, Life is sweet,'
Sang the blackbird in the may;
And the hour with flying feet,
While they dreamed, was yesterday.

Many a maid and many a man
Found the leafage close and boon;
Many a destiny began—
O, the morn was merry June!
Dead and gone, dead and gone,
(Hark the blackbird in the may!)
Life and Death went hurrying on,
Cheek on cheek—and where were they?

Dust on dust engendering dust
  In the leafage fresh and boon,
Man and maid fulfil their trust—
  Still the morn turns merry June.
Mother Life, Father Death,
  (O, the blackbird in the may!)
Each the other's breath for breath,
  Fleet the times of the world away.

XXIII

To A. C.

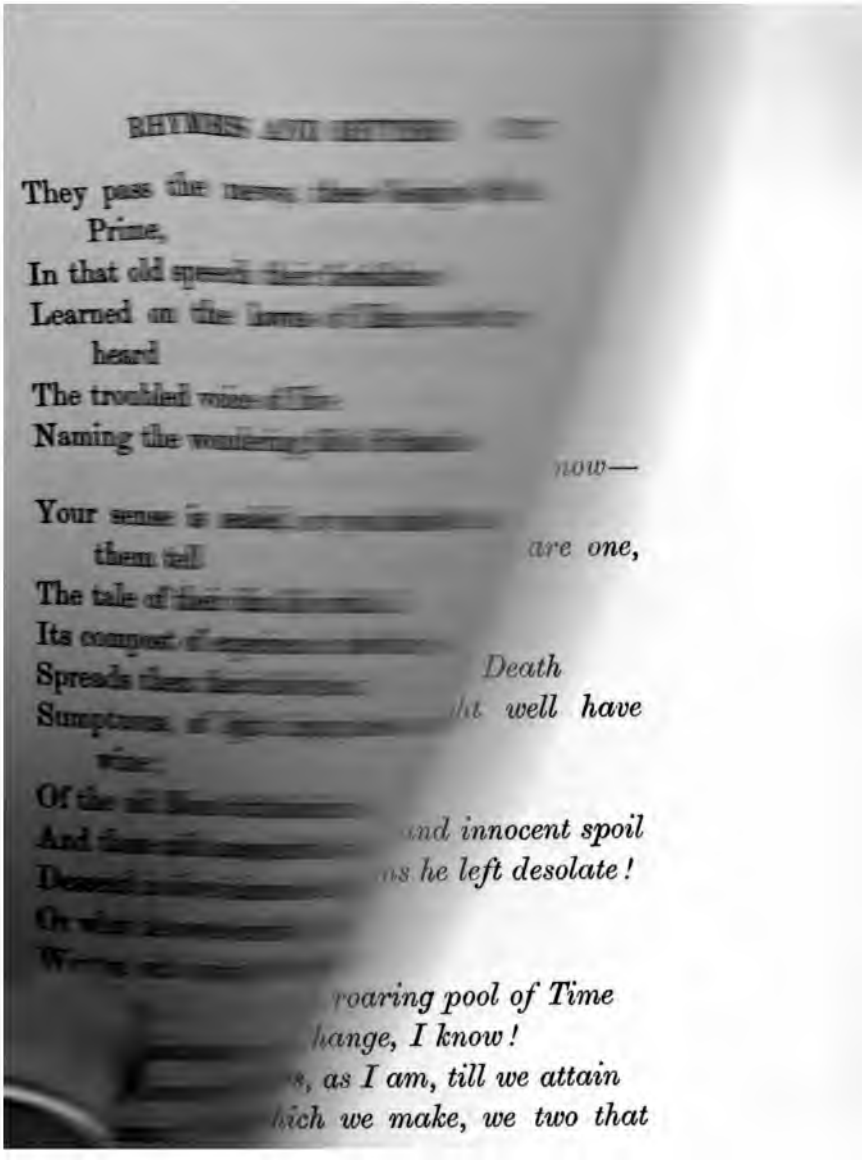
Not to the staring Day,
For all the importunate questionings he pursues
In his big, violent voice,
Shall those mild things of bulk and multitude,
The Trees—God's sentinels
Over His gift of live, life-giving air,
Yield of their huge, unutterable selves.
Midsummer-manifold, each one
Voluminous, a labyrinth of life,
They keep their greenest musings, and the dim dreams
That haunt their leafier privacies,
Dissembled, baffling the random gapeseed still
With blank full-faces, or the innocent guile
Of laughter flickering back from shine to shade,

And disappearances of homing birds,
And frolicsome freaks
Of little boughs that frisk with little boughs.

But at the word
Of the ancient, sacerdotal Night,
Night of the many secrets, whose effect—
Transfiguring, hierophantic, dread—
Themselves alone may fully apprehend,
They tremble and are changed.
In each, the uncouth individual soul
Looms forth and glooms
Essential, and, their bodily presences
Touched with inordinate significance,
Wearing the darkness like the livery
Of some mysterious and tremendous guild,
They brood—they menace—they appal;
Or the anguish of prophecy tears them, and they wring
Wild hands of warning in the face
Of some inevitable advance of doom;
Or, each to the other bending, beckoning, signing
As in some monstrous market-place,

They pass the news, these Gossips of the Prime,
In that old speech their forefathers
Learned on the lawns of Eden, ere they heard
The troubled voice of Eve
Naming the wondering folk of Paradise.

Your sense is sealed, or you should hear them tell
The tale of their dim life, with all
Its compost of experience: how the Sun
Spreads them their daily feast,
Sumptuous, of light, firing them as with wine;
Of the old Moon's fitful solicitude
And those mild messages the Stars
Descend in silver silences and dews;
Or what the sweet-breathing West,
Wanton with wading in the swirl of the wheat,
Said, and their leafage laughed;
And how the wet-winged Angel of the Rain
Came whispering . . . whispering; and the gifts of the Year—



The sting of the stirring sap
Under the wizardry of the young-eyed
Spring,
Their summer amplitudes of pomp,
Their rich autumnal melancholy, and the
shrill,
Embittered housewifery
Of the lean Winter: all such things,
And with them all the goodness of the
Master,
Whose right hand blesses with increase and
life,
Whose left hand honours with decay and
death.

Thus under the constraint of Night
These gross and simple creatures,
Each in his scores of rings, which rings are
years,
A servant of the Will!
And God, the Craftsman, as He walks
The floor of His workshop, hearkens, full of
cheer
In thus accomplishing
The aims of His miraculous artistry.

EPILOGUE

These, to you now, O, more than ever now—
Now that the Ancient Enemy
Has passed, and we, we two that are one, have seen
A piece of perfect Life
Turn to so ravishing a shape of Death
The Arch-Discomforter might well have smiled
In pity and pride,
Even as he bore his lovely and innocent spoil
From those home-kingdoms he left desolate!

Poor windlestraws
On the great, sullen, roaring pool of Time
And Chance and Change, I know!
But they are yours, as I am, till we attain
That end for which we make, we two that are one:

A little, exquisite Ghost
Between us, smiling with the serenest eyes
Seen in this world, and calling, calling still
In that clear voice whose infinite subtleties
Of sweetness, thrilling back across the grave,
Break the poor heart to hear:—
'Come, Dadsie, come!
Mama, how long—how long!'

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